DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 344 CS 206 375

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TITLE A Look at the Tutorial Method of Teaching Freshman Composition.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 98p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Freshmen; Conferences; Evaluation; Higher Education; Peer Teaching; Small Group Instruction; State of the Art Reviews; *Teaching Methods; Tutorial Programs; *Tutoring; *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS *Freshman Composition

ABSTRACT

Intended as an overview for English department faculty with no direct experience in teaching freshman composition, this report contains a general account of the origin, basic features, and current direction of using tutorial methods in freshman composition classes. The five sections of the report provide the following information: (1) the history of the American tutorial method of teaching freshman composition, including its trans-Atlantic roots in England; (2) the teacher/student conference strategy as applied in the tutorial method; (3) evaluation of the tutorial classroom; (4) using small writing groups and peer teaching strategies in the tutorial classroom; and (5) the future of the tutorial classroom. (RL)

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A LOOK AT THE TUTORIAL METHOD OF TEACHING FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

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University of Virginia
English 995
April, 1981
Frances Martin

CS206375

FOREWORD

In writing this review of the tutorial method of teaching freshman composition, I had in mind an audience of English Department faculty with no direct experience in this type of course. The material to follow aims to give such an audience a concise, general account of the origin, basic features, and current direction of this growing movement. In no sense an exhaustive or scholarly study, my work merely provides what I have tried to make an accurate, readable overview. In presenting this overview, I speak as a curious and friendly observer with no personal or professional commitment to the tutorial method. This project has given me a chance to explore a new and promising way of teaching writing, and I hope this report will have the same value for its readers.

The body of this paper includes two long sections that may seem out of place in view of my intended audience: the discussion of conference strategy and the use of small writing groups in the tutorial classroom. These sections appear because they contain information new to many English faculty. From personal experience I know that one can hardly talk sensibly about the tutorial method without some grasp of these two topics. Certainly any teacher seriously interested in trying the tutorial approach will want to know about these areas before he or she begins.

The material included herein comes from five main sources:

1. A series of interviews with fifteen freshman composition teachers at Piedmont Virginia Community College during October, 1980.

2. Published materials and papers presented at recent conferences and seminars.

3. Unpublished theses, reports and manuscripts.

4. Personal interviews and correspondence with faculty members at the University of Virginia and other colleges in the United States.

5. A year of work in the University of Virginia Writing Center, a year as assistant tutor at Piedmont Virginia Community College in a composition course taught by Richard Harrington, and a semester in ENWR 201 at the University of Virginia taught by Stephen Railton. From the outset I realized that my time, training and resources precluded case studies, controlled experiments or student surveys. Perhaps this paper will serve as a preliminary to such projects at some future date.

By far the hardest section to prepare was the historical background of the conferencing or tutorial method. Though it seems to me that we really need some account of where the method came from in order to assess its goals and performance, I could not find such an account in print. Thus I had to piece together facts and hints from many places to provide the most coherent history possible. If my efforts have fallen short, I only hope they may spur others to refute me by doing a better job. At best these pages offer a sketch rather than a detailed account of the method's past.

Those who have given freely of their time and expertise in this effort deserve grateful mention here. They include Harold H. Kolb, Jr., Professor of English and my always encouraging advisor; Richard Harrington, Director of Freshman Composition, Piedmont Virginia Community College; Stephen Railton, Associate Professor of English; James Strzepek, Associate Professor of Education; and J. Marvin Homzie, Associate Professor of Psychology. Those teachers at Piedmont Virginia Community College who took part in the interviews that contributed so many insights to the paper include Andrew Allen, Randy Beckham, David Black, Charles Cleary, Pat Denison,

Tom Gill, Jewell Ann Gottschalk, Bill Owen, Tom Pirkle, Cathie Platt, Clare Smith, Jeff Sobel, Jane Walpole, and Bill Wood. I am indebted to numerous members of the community college staff who worked on arrangements to make the interviews possible. I would also like to thank Professor Irvin Ehrenpreis, Director of Graduate Studies in English, for his approval of this atypical English 995 project.

Frances Martin

April 1, 1981

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Section I.

History of the American Tutorial Method of Teaching Freshman Composition

To most of the academic world, the term, "tutorial method" means the time-honored mode of teaching in the colleges at England's oldest universities, Oxford and Cambridge. Though current writers on teaching composition seldom if ever mention any debt to such British practice, this trans-Atlantic model has exerted an indirect but constant influence on American educators. Rhodes scholars imbued with faith in its powers annually return to play key roles at major universities. Advocates of honors programs boost them as closer to the English practice. Professors speak of the tutorial approach with deep respect. Despite the contrast between the physical and cultural context of the British tutorial and the American classroom, the ritual clamor for more individualized instruction in American education has added to the appeal of the tutorial concept. By looking more closely at the British tutorial method, we can see why its influence might be particularly strong on those seeking new ways to teach writing.

In a short description of this English method, The Tutorial System and Its Future (1968), Will G. Moore details a process that has much in common with some current American approaches to the writing conference. In this process, each student attends regular, private (one-to-one) tutorial sessions with a member of his college faculty. There he reads a paper he has written on some topic assigned at the previous session while the teacher listens and interrupts with comments or questions from time to time. During the Oxford or Cambridge tutorial, the student's own writing remains the focus of discussion, and the close, private contact between tutor and student promotes free and full exchange of ideas. Moore points out that because

the student takes the central role in the tutorial, the good tutor gauges his response to the individual student. Moreover, to his mind, "the tutor must not teach."[1] The key to success lies in the give-and-take between tutor and student, based on a skeptical, non-authoritarian view of knowledge: "a good teacher will help the student to refute or correct him . . . he will teach method rather than hard and fast conclusions."[2] Moore maintains that students learn better when they can contribute, rather than merely listen and accept.[3] As we shall see, all this theory finds a parallel if not an echo in the words of leading American theorists on teacher-student interaction. Ironically, the tutorial, long the elitist preserve in pedagogy, now finds itself touted in article after article as the solution for some of the problems of mass education in the United States.

Until the 1960's standard freshman composition courses in America bore almost no likeness to the Oxford or Cambridge tutorial. That comment remains nearly the only safe generalization on the subject since courses in individual colleges varied so widely. However, certain practices have gained notoriety as part of what reformers now like to call "current traditional rhetoric." Since most of these practices occurred in my own freshman English course at the University of Rochester, I judge that it was fairly typical of such rhetoric. Thus by sketching that course I may give the reader a sense of what freshman composition was often like in the early 1950's. During most classes the teacher lectured on aspects of writing like note-taking, outlining, paragraphing, and footnoting, or explained elements of logic and semantics. Occasionally we discussed the organization and ideas in one of the long essays in our anthology written by leading thinkers of the day like Bertrand Russell, Robert Hutchins, or Erich Fromm. Sometimes we spent part of a class working on exercises to improve our skills in

punctuation or sentence structure. Every week we wrote a "theme" on some abstract topic to practice some rhetorical mode (the first assignment: define Democracy). During the term we completed a long research paper with formal footnotes and bibliography. We did all writing outside of class, turned our papers in on Friday, and received them back on Monday, corrected and graded. Symbols written in the margin informed us of grammatical or mechanical errors. In order to revise our papers, we consulted the handbook, where the symbols were explained. Revised papers went back to the teacher, but we never saw them again. Sometimes the teacher would read the best paper of the week to the class, but we listened to his comment on it without making any of our own. Once a semester we went to the teacher's office for a fifteen-minute conference to hear a summary of our strengths and weaknesses as writers. It never would have occurred to me to ask for help from the teacher at any point in the writing of a theme. Students thought the grading of themes harsh and incomprehensible; we all found the course a terrifying sink-or-swim experience--almost an initiation ordeal that decided our fitness for academic life.

As far as I have been able to discover, American teachers and students by and large accepted this pattern until the 1960's. Then a number of social forces united to shake up academic habits. In that period of unrest sparked by the Vietnam War, established practices and institutions came under fire. During this ferment centered on college campuses, many teachers and students began to see their relationship differently, shedding what they saw as authoritarian methods and groping toward cooperation.[4] Mary Edwards gives a more detailed account of this shift in roles at the opening of her thesis, "Collaborative Learning."[5] Radical styles in faculty dress and behavior attempting to reduce the distance between teacher and student and symbolizing

this revised self-image persist today among many instructors who came of age during this period. At the same time, college enrollment swelled to include a larger and more diverse student body. In many of those colleges that retained a required freshman composition course, teachers began to search for relief from ever more time-consuming grading of a larger number of lower quality student papers. Moreover, just when many students required more help, more of them lacked the degree of self-confidence formerly common to undergraduates. As a result, they were likely to be alienated by the sheer bulk of marginal comments and error notation on their graded writing. Many teachers began to question a method that made them work harder but helped students less than ever before. To add to the problems, professional essays and practice in rhetorical modes seemed remote and irrelevant to many of the new students, who were strangers to academic attitudes and values. More and more of these students wrote poorly, skipped conferences, and finally dropped out. Such conditions fanned the grumbling about traditional methods.

In 1965 Paul O'Dea published "Five Myths in the Teaching of Composition," attacking the assumption of most composition teaching that

1. Students learn to write by reading great literature.
2. Students learn to write by analyzing and imitating great essays.
3. Students learn to write well by grammatical analysis.
4. Students learn to write better by reconstructing other people's sentences.
5. Students improve their writing as a result of teacher criticism.[6]

To the teacher stripped of these assumptions, much of traditional practice became pointless. During this study, I found a bedrock conviction that the old methods of teaching writing just do not work with today's students

underlying both theory and practice of the American brand of the tutorial method. To the degree that the teacher holds this conviction, he will welcome radical formats such as the tutorial classroom.

Renewed study of classical rhetoric also fueled attacks on established methods. This study, begun in the late 50's by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's Modern Rhetoric[7] and climaxed by the publication of Edward P.J. Corbett's Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student (1965),[8] directed attention to the pre-drafting stages of composition. Led by Aristotle, classical rhetoricians stressed elaborate processes for mining ideas and mounting them in the most effective fashion. This emphasis led what has been called "The New Rhetoric" to the premise that writing should be taught as process rather than product. "The New Classicists," as Richard Young calls them, see composition as a craft that can be mastered in a series of stages by any properly instructed student. They believe that the main job of the teacher is to train the student in this craft,[9] rather than to supply principles for judging the final piece of writing, the product. The teacher as guide or enabler replaces the teacher as critic, as Janice Lauer puts it.[10]

Another spur to the revision of classroom practice was the publication in 1968 of Teaching the Universe of Discourse by James Moffett. In this work Moffett articulated and organized a number of insights that still dominate much thinking about writing instruction. Because of their key relationship to the American tutorial method, some of his ideas deserve attention here.

1. Writing is a skill, not a subject matter with an organized body of content. Therefore, teaching composition requires different methods than teaching history or science.[11]

2. "One failure of English teaching has been to consider only messages," ignoring the sender and receiver. Teachers should set up small group workshops where students can read and comment on each other's writing so that they can gain a sense of voice and audience.[12] (This interest in peer groups as a way to develop a sense of audience struck little response in some pioneers of the tutorial method like Donald Murray and Roger Garrison, but it has influenced recent practice, as we shall see later.)

3. Students learn to write by writing and receiving feedback rather than by hearing good writing described. Feedback should occur before the final draft.[13]

4. Grades should be deferred until the end of the course.[14]

5. Textbooks handicap the student by providing so much advice that the student concentrates on avoiding mistakes rather than developing his subject. Exercises fail to aid the student because they supply little motivation and remain isolated from any controlling intent and context.[15]

6. Assignments should draw from the writer's experience or personal reading rather than from intimidating models in a text.[16]

Though Moffett's ideas permeate the thought of later writers on the teaching of composition, many of his successors neither acknowledge nor recognize his influence.

The same period saw growing attention to teacher-student conferences. As we have noted, such conferences had become a recommended feature of traditional freshman composition courses (possibly in an effort to capture some of the intimacy of the one-to-one English tutorial?), but they typically occurred only once or twice a semester. As early as 1960, Janet Emig reported a high school English program enriched by bi-weekly tutorial sessions.[17] In his 1980 dissertation "Conferencing Practices of Professional

Writers: Ten Case Studies," Thomas Reigstad traces the heightened interest in this phase of the composition course in the late 60's and early 70's and suggests that it might have resulted from the decline of student writing skills, then stirring up the whole profession.[18] He notes a move to give conferencing a larger role in the regular classroom session in a 1968 survey by J.R. Squire and R.K. Applebee entitled, High School English Instruction Today (p. 7). In 1978 College English printed a report by B. Fassler that as early as 1969, the English Department of Central College in Iowa had adopted the conference as a substitute for written comments on student papers.[19] In a 1973 article S.N. Judy of the English Department at Michigan State anticipated some of Roger Garrison's key points by urging that teachers push for improvement of the paper in hand, like a professional editor, rather than merely trusting that their comments will improve some future piece of writing. Though the author's concept of teacher intervention remained less systematic than Garrison's, he did propose certain check points or priorities in dealing with student work and urged as much one-to-one contact as possible.[20] But perhaps the most important pioneer in the conferencing movement was Donald Murray, whose A Writer Teaches Writing (1968) proposed that the regular class hour should become a writing laboratory featuring one-to-one student conferences.[21] He urged that students learn by practicing all stages of the writing process, in imitation of the way professional writers work. Along with his fellow New Englanders, Lester Fisher and Roger Garrison, Murray developed and publicized what we now call the conference method or tutorial classroom.

In his 1974 article, "One-to-One: Tutorial Instruction in Freshman Composition,"[22] Garrison issued the manifesto of the tutorial method. In twenty-eight pages he managed to summarize and systematize the work of more

original thinkers like Moffett and Murray. Concise and readable, this piece has attracted widespread attention and inspired imitators in all parts of the country, including the faculty of nearby Piedmont Virginia Community College. Garrison began by renewing the attack on traditional methods of freshman composition instruction as "teacher-oriented and text-oriented, and grossly inefficient."[23] Later he listed seven "major teaching errors" in the traditional process.[24] In its place he proposed the writing workshop, borrowing the English term "tutorial" to describe the practice.

Brief teacher-student conferences about the progress of the student's own writing form the backbone of this method. Like Moffett, Garrison believes that a proper composition course keeps students writing all the time in class and provides constant feedback at every stage of the writing process. At first the teacher serves as reader and diagnostician, but he gradually leads students to spot and correct their own faults. Like the Oxford tutor, he aims to work with the student as partner or coach rather than as judge or taskmaster. As Moffett urged, he tailors assignments to individual interests and experiences. The student learns to write by mastering the successive steps or skills of writing one at a time. As an original contribution, Garrison insists that a student must gain approval for his work on each step before moving to the next stage. In common with Aristotelian rhetoric, the pre-drafting steps are critically important because they supply the specific content, the focus, the proper arrangement, and the point of view to be used in drafting the composition. In his role as tutor, the teacher points out only one problem at a time until it has been corrected. The choice of problem depends on the stage of writing in which the student is working; for instance, the tutor ignores grammar and spelling errors during the pre-writing and early drafting stages. A reference file of

worksheets on common writing problems to which the tutor can refer students makes short conferences possible.[25] These worksheets replace the full class instruction provided in other methods. Also like Moffett, Garrison de-emphasizes textbooks and grades. At the end of the course, the student submits for grading what he considers his best work. During the course both teacher and student focus on ways to improve his writing, free from the constant anxiety about what grade it will receive.

Garrison sums up his practice in one paragraph in his latest book, How A Writer Works (1980):

> Such individual teaching can be done, is being done. In no way does the approach dilute the quality of instruction; indeed, it is more rigorous than traditional ways of instruction. There is a small but growing body of research which validates the effectiveness of one-to-one (apprentice-master) instruction. And there is a massive bonus for the teacher, and another for the student, in teaching writing this way. The instructor need no longer take home endless stacks of papers to be evaluated and commented on. And the student comes to see writing as a series of skills that can be mastered, one by one. (The student also has the special experience of having the undiluted attention of the teacher.)[26]

In his prospectus for a summer workshop at Westbrook College, Garrison makes similar claims about this plan:

> Institute participants learn how to manage the instruction-learning situation so that they will be able to establish a tutorial, one-to-one relationship with students in classes up to 35--within the framework of a standard 50-minute class. Further, using the methods practiced at the Institute, teachers discover that they never again have to take home papers to be corrected. And their students' writing productivity will be nearly double what is usual in a traditionally instructed course.

And at the same time,

> The teacher-learning approaches emphasized in the Institute are extremely flexible. They can be adapted by each instructor to suit his own teaching style and the realities of his own college situation.[27]

In short, to the teacher grappling with the diverse student body and heavy paper load of many contemporary classrooms, the Garrison approach promises relief. As a result, in the seven years since the publication of his article, tutorial classrooms have appeared across the country.

As Garrison contends, much educational research does support his rejection of traditional teaching. In a summary of studies related to writing over the last decade, Elizabeth Haynes tells us, "it seems safe to conclude from studies to date that intensive correction of errors is futile."[28] In working with the less able student, detailed correction can actually block the writer's growth by increasing his sense of futility. Haynes's survey

also supports Garrison's stress on pre-writing[29] and his belief that suggestions for writing improvement should be offered one at a time.[30] Another point of agreement is the emphasis on revision during the writing process, not after grading.[31] These results encourage the conscientious teacher to explore such promising kinds of classroom practice as the Garrison approach.

At first, individuals led the way. Even though their colleagues remained attached to traditional teaching, one or two teachers in a department often struck out on their own. Notable examples appear in most bibliographies on the conference method, names like Thomas Newkirk and Charles Duke in New England and Charles Dawe and Edward Dornan, a California team, authors of a recent text entitled, One-to-One: Resources for Conference-Centered Writing.[32] These teachers report that they have reduced or cut out formal class sessions in order to spend most of their time in conference with individual students. In Errors and Expectations (1977), Mina Shaughnessy urged teachers to set up a class format closely resembling the Garrison model. This format included 3-4 days a week for "supervised writing practice" guided by one teacher and two students for each class of fifteen.[33] By then the tutorial concept had become so much a matter of common knowledge that she did not pause to cite either Murray or Garrison.

Eventually whole English departments rebuilt their writing programs according to the Garrison format. Now using the conference method in developmental and technical writing classes as well as freshman composition, Piedmont Virginia Community College provides a local example. Santa Barbara City College adds another from the west coast. On a much larger scale, the Los Angeles Community College District recently conducted a

controlled experiment at four of its campuses to test the effectiveness of the tutorial approach with students at all levels of achievement. Garrison himself acted as consultant to the study. According to the final report, "We now have a tested, proven answer. On all four campuses, students in the individualized Garrison classes made greater gains in writing ability than the students in the control sections. This was true on both the remedial level and the Freshman English level."[34] From such enthusiasm we may expect that the Garrison method will soon make a clean sweep of freshman writing classes in this huge system.

The tutorial approach also extends beyond freshman composition courses into many types of writing classes. On the high school level, individual teachers in the Albemarle County system now conduct workshop classes. "Project Literacy," an effort to improve writing in grades 9-12 at the Huntington Beach Union High School District at Huntington Beach, California, employs similar methods.[35] From Vancouver, British Columbia, come glowing reports of the use of the Garrison method for teaching students learning English as a second language.[36] An unpublished text, Managing Writing, by Ellen W. Nold of the School of Engineering at Stanford University, urges use of the tutorial for teaching writing in adult education courses, where persons from business and industry seek help with job-related writing tasks. Since those who describe these courses do not all acknowledge Garrison's influence, we cannot always be sure whether Garrison created the wave or rode it. However, from all sides testimony in favor of the conferencing method continues to pour into the literature.

In talking about the "Garrison Method," we must note that this approach lacks rigid definition. The tutorial theme admits many variations, and in the case of some programs, an observer might ask whether he is

dealing with the same method at all. To some extent Garrison himself promotes these variations by stressing the flexibility of his method, as seen in the institute prospectus already quoted. Thomas Carnicelli asserts that all courses using frequent conferences, a process approach, and a reasonable set of priorities, use the same basic method of teaching writing.[37] For the purpose of this study, I have included as tutorial programs all courses where at least half of class time or teacher-student contact time is spent discussing individual student writing in a one-to-one or small group setting.

But within this category there are important differences. Though Garrison insists that a teacher can handle tutorial conferences for up to 35 students during class time, last fall's Piedmont interviews showed that even highly experienced teachers often find that impossible. One way to provide more conference time, now under trial at Piedmont, involves either advanced students or graduate personnel as assistant tutors in the classroom. According to the project report already quoted, both the Santa Barbara and Los Angeles Community College programs also employ assistant tutors. While this practice may cause problems whenever teacher and assistant give conflicting advice, Piedmont teachers agree that on the balance assistant tutors are a big help. Another way to extend conference time in general use at Piedmont is the office conference. In fact, teachers of writing , Lester Fisher and Donald Murray, published an article in 1973 entitled, "Perhaps the Professor Should Cut Class," in which they described a course without class meetings, conducted entirely by office conference.[38] In the office, one-to-one sessions typically last longer and include more kinds of business, such as discussing future assignments. Thus, the handling of conferences varies widely according to the talents of the instructor and the facilities available.

The use of new texts designed for courses that stress writing as a process, or even especially for those that use the tutorial approach, reveals further departure from Garrison practice. At Piedmont students had to buy Elizabeth and Gregory Cowan's Writing for the first time in the fall of 1980. Like Moffatt and Garrison, many of the teachers there saw little need for a text except as a reference or occasional back-up with less able students. But the return to a text offers one way of relieving the pressure on the teacher in the tutorial classroom. As Charles Dawe and Edward Dornan point out in the teacher's manual of their new book,

> . . . when we first threw away our readers and handbooks and plunged into conferences, we suddenly found ourselves no longer teaching two classes of thirty each, but sixty classes of one each. We began to panic, and the panic deepened when we realized that our students still needed most of the information we had been dispensing directly in lectures or smuggling in through discussions. For instance, if a student was writing about the causes of a particular experience, he needed to learn something about developing a piece through causality, right? Altogether thirty-one out of sixty students might naturally but awkwardly use causal development on thirty-one separate occasions. Without the appropriate materials at hand, we found ourselves delivering thirty-one mini-lectures at

> thirty-one different times. Meanwhile, the students lining up to see us would begin to fidget and emit exasperated sounds from their windpipes. We would begin to feel like novice banktellers at noon on payday.[39]

Piedmont teachers complain of similar problems. Professor Harold Kolb of the University of Virginia adds that one may have to give the same information over and over to the same student. One cure for this waste of effort lies in some sort of printed material to which the tutor can refer the student. Although Garrison does not discuss the details in his article, one observer of his work reports that he provides three sets of worksheets in his classroom, to which he sends students with routine problems.[40] In the early stages of the Piedmont program, teachers tried to use a reference file for this purpose, but because there was only one copy, the constant chore of moving it from class to class became too cumbersome. Such problems help explain the appeal of a properly designed text.

Local variations of all types abound. As a supplement to the tutorial classroom, several teachers at Piedmont feel that keeping a journal helps students master certain parts of the writing process, especially the pre-writing stages. While Garrison favors short assignments, usually limited to a single paragraph or one page,[41] Piedmont writing assignments in the beginning course run to five-hundred words. Some teachers who use office tutorials most extensively, including one Piedmont teacher, find cassette-recorded comments helpful. Project Literacy spurred self-correction by having students read their papers to a recorder and then listen for their own mistakes.[42] Probably the most important departure from the Garrison approach is the use of small critique groups, a method which will receive

detailed attention in a later section. Although Garrison's article sets up a definite format for the tutorial classroom, he points out, "One man's method may be another person's mistake!"[43] A student at one of his workshops, Piedmont teacher Cathie Platt, reports that he encourages others to develop their own approaches and makes no claim to know all the answers. While these variations make the method hard to define, they increase the number of teachers comfortable with the tutorial classroom.

Section II.

Conference Strategy

As the one-to-one session plays an ever larger role in most methods of teaching composition and takes center stage in the tutorial workshop, we note more debate over conference strategy. Where and when should the conference occur? What should the teacher say and do in such a situation? Should he adopt a new strategy or just deliver the same comments orally that he would otherwise write on the paper? What kind of response from the student should he expect or elicit? What effect should this interaction have on student writing? From my student days I remember going to a conference like a condemned criminal going before the judge for sentencing. It never occurred to me to make any comments or suggestions because the decisions were out of my hands. But challenging such one-sided encounters, the work of such men as Carl Rogers and Benjamin Bloom has raised insistent questions about the one-to-one experience and the nature of wholesome student-teacher interaction (pp. 2-3). These questions have sparked many articles prescribing what a conference should be in order to effect the most growth in student writers. Most recently this concern has led to more

intensive study like the work of Thomas Reigstad and Peter Schiff in classifying and evaluating conference models.

This section of the paper will describe some current models that might be useful in the freshman writing course. Since many tutorial programs, such as that at Piedmont, use more than one type of conference, these models will include both the brief, in-class tutorials such as Garrison describes, and longer conferences in either the classroom or office. By comparing their own strategies with those of others, teachers can become more conscious of their practices and clarify their aims. They can also discover new ways of relating to students and their work and thus expand their repertoire of strategies for use in a wider range of situations. Finally, they may learn how flexibly to apply these formulas from comparing the theory and practice of noted teacher-writers such as Roger Garrison, Donald Murray, and Walker Gibson. Such a comparison has become possible through the doctoral thesis of Thomas Reigstad, "Conferencing Practices of Professional Writers," in which he reports the results of observing and tape-recording actual one-to-one sessions conducted by ten such individuals. His subjects include both exponents of the tutorial classroom (Garrison, Murray, Newkirk) and teachers using conferences in tandem with full-class instruction.

Probably most teachers would expect the study of such models to uncover the best strategy for helping students write better. But the deceptively simple question of helping students write "better" conceals a number of complex issues about writing and teaching for which there are as yet no simple answers. This question will be treated in greater depth when we move to the evaluation of the tutorial method as a whole. In relation to conferences, some current studies assume that "better" means

more extensively revised. With this assumption Suzanne Jacobs and Adela Karliner have endorsed a conference technique that gives the student control of the session and leads him to do the larger part of the talking because such a student "is more likely . . . to initiate substantive changes in the writing under discussion" (p. 38). But I have turned up no research that proves a correlation between the amount of revision and the quality of the finished paper. While most teachers probably share the assumption that the correlation must be high, we should recognize that this assumption remains unproved. In fact, a 1973 study by Charlotte Effros produced contrary evidence:

> In writing essays, at least under test conditions, students whose revisions were guided by the teachers and whose work was not graded until such revisions were completed achieved no better than students whose work was immediately graded and revisions treated incidentally.[44]

(However, the author of this study admitted that these results may have been due to use of experimental and control groups that began at different levels of writing ability.) Partly because he failed to obtain complete samples of both the pre-conference drafts and post-conference revisions from all forty students included in his study, Reigstad provides no basis for deciding which conference model inspired the fullest revision and, presumably, the best writing. He merely cites the evaluation of conference strategies as an area for further research. Moreover, his studies made no effort to control variables such as the level of student ability or "other interventions taking place from the conclusion of the conference to the composing of the revision" (p. 309). He must have realized early in his work that he did not have resources to tackle the tough problem of locating the most successful conference strategies for use

with various levels of student writers. The teacher must then decide which strategy works best for him by observing for himself how students respond to various approaches.

Once we start thinking about rating conference models, we flush the ultimate question: Which conference models stimulate not only the most thorough revision of the paper at hand but also the most thorough revision of future papers? What we really want to find is some way of changing student writing behavior permanently. We hope they will thoroughly revise (and improve) not only the paper they bring to the conference but all future papers they write. But as an operational principle, we are forced to hope that the practice in revision provided by freshman composition will establish a life-long habit.

Reigstad's work turns up one other dilemma tied to evaluating conference strategy. Most analyses of conference techniques require the reader to trust the observer, even when they include partial transcriptions of the conferences themselves. In the classification of teacher behavior according to type, like teacher-centered, student-centered, or collaborative, the analysis always demands some kind of judgment. But Reigstad's thesis undercuts this trust by appending analyses of his tape-recorded interviews by two independent associates, Eugene and Rita Gerber. While their descriptions generally parallel his, Rita Gerber disagreed sharply with his response to conferences of Walker Gibson (p. 336) and Ron Winslow (p. 362). Reigstad puts Gibson in his second group, those who practice the collaborative model. He describes this relationship as mostly conversant-conversant.

> Tutors in this model not only treat students as conversational equals, but involve them in problem-solving as well. When tutors suggest solutions, they

> often qualify their directiveness, and customarily leave final decisions up to students. (pp. 291-2)

Reigstad tells us that "the responses of the two outside investigators yielded impressions similar to my own" (p. 142). He then lists some points of agreement. But for some reason he ignores part of Gerber's comments that contrasts sharply with his own description of the category into which he sets Gibson, partially described above. To highlight the question of observer reliability, I quote Rita Gerber's remarks:

> In his directive teacher's role, Gibson is in charge, making decisions about the shape of the conference, about the writer's drafts, about the writer's problems and the solutions to those problems. . . . He seems often to manipulate writers into saying what he wants them to say and into doing what he wants them to do. . . . It is not at all uncommon for Gibson to cut a writer who is speaking to him off in mid-sentence. (p. 336)
> . . . Several times he claimed that the writer and he had figured something out together, when in actuality Professor Gibson had made the decisions and had then gotten the writer to accept those decisions. (p. 337)

Gerber ends by stating concisely the whole dilemma of reliably classifying conference strategies: "Because the dynamics involved in any conferencing situation are much more complex than this report indicates, it may be that attempting to classify Gibson as a particular "type" of tutor is a bit misleading"(p. 340). In the case of Ron Winslow, Reigstad finds him

student-centered (p. 297), while Rita Gerber responds quite differently. "Professor Winslow assumes a fairly directive role during each of the four conferences. He does more 'telling' than either questioning or listening when he converses with his writers, and he often speaks in terms of what the writers 'need to' do or 'should have' done in their drafts" (p. 362). This appears to conflict with Reigstad's view of the student-centered conference, where the tutor "listens a great deal . . . asks a few questions, and often contributes personal recollections and associations to add to the student's discovery of a subject . . . . When the tutor does suggest a revision, he emphasizes that the draft should be the student's own work" (p. 298). Though these discrepancies regarding Gibson and Winslow add a note of caution to the following discussion of conference strategies, there remains much value to a study of the many ways that a teacher may deal with individual students and their writing. Such a study expands our sense of what can be done in conferencing and how to do it.

The reader should keep in mind two further points when considering conference strategies. Though most writers on the subject deal with one isolated approach, in actual practice teachers shift roles during the conference. While Reigstad observed two teachers who managed fairly "pure" conferences confined to a single strategy (Mac Hammond and Donald Murray) most of his subjects were more flexible. A teacher might adopt an authoritative posture in dealing with objective matters like spelling but turn collaborative when helping the student explore alternatives in focus or organization. Secondly, the length of the conference may limit the choice of approach. Relatively student-centered, non-directive strategies used with average students seem to require more time for questioning and thinking than teacher-centered, directive ones. Although Garrison urges the teacher

to let the student "increasingly identify for himself where and how a piece of writing can be improved, strengthened, made more interesting,"[45] this procedure may be difficult in his 1-3 minute conferences. Reigstad's report of Garrison's conferences at a late stage of a composition course supports this conjecture. Reigstad calls Garrison's conference one of his two examples of the teacher-centered model (p. 287). This model is characterized "by the teacher doing most of the talking and at times, much of the work for the student" (p. 287). This diagnosis contrasts sharply with Garrison's advice, "It is the student's job to do the writing work--all of it."[46] According to Reigstad's transcriptions, Garrison writes correct spelling, missing punctuation, and more concise phrasing directly on the student's paper. Furthermore, Reigstad tells us, "Most of the questions he posed to students were closed or leading, which demanded little talk, especially of an exploratory nature, by students" (p. 88). Moreover, "In post-conference interviews, Garrison's students mentioned how during conferences he would usually tell them when they had committed errors, correct them by writing on their papers, and explain 'how to fix it'" (p. 89). If we keep in mind the tendency to shift roles in conference and the relation of the length of conference to the teacher's role, we can avoid some of the distortions likely when conference strategies are discussed in isolation.

The <u>teacher-centered</u> or directive approach may describe writing conferences in traditional courses and, as seen from analysis of Garrison's work, many tutorial classrooms as well. From their own accounts, at least two Piedmont teachers prefer this strategy. Reigstad gives this description of the teacher-centered conference:

1. The teacher does most of the talking.

2. The teacher does much of the work.

3. Students behave passively.

4. Teachers ask few questions, mostly closed or leading questions. (A closed questions calls for a yes or no answer, or a short, succinct response. A leading questions leads the respondent to parrot information already known to both himself and the questioner (p. 67).)

5. Teachers often answer their own questions or give the student no chance to answer.

6. The teacher often tells the student how to revise.

7. Talk about ideas remains limited.

8. Teachers direct the shift to succeeding phases of the conference. (p. 287)

As already noted, Reigstad does not deal with the relative strength of this strategy in improving student writing. Yet he tells us that his subjects were selected because "they are well-published writers . . . who teach . . . writing courses in English departments at colleges in the northeastern United States " (p. 54). Thus he seems to take their success as teachers for granted because they are presently employed in that capacity. Reigstad also reports that freshmen of diverse levels of achievement said they liked the teacher-centered model (p. 307). Patricia and Richard Schmuck, leading students of classroom interaction, state that one-way classroom communication (teacher --> student) works best with highly motivated students eager to acquire information. Even then students learn most when listening to answers to questions they have already raised for themselves.[47] As noted earlier, recent social changes have reduced respect for so-called

authoritarian education, and this model may invite the same sort of criticism. In 1973 in an article on teaching composition J. Pumphrey declared, "No one, in the decade of the seventies, is convinced by being told."[48] If this state of affairs persists, many students in the 80's (unlike Reigstad's freshmen) may find fault with this strategy, which certainly is a form of telling. As another objection, Thomas Carnicelli fears that the teacher-centered conference may waste two people's time: "If the teacher does most or all of the talking, the student may simply sit there, politely confused."[49] Another doubt raised by this method is whether it teaches the student how to deal independently with future writing tasks, the real aim of writing instruction. The current trend of conference theory assumes that it does not and turns away from the teacher-centered model.

Reigstad describes a second model, which he calls collaborative. As might be expected, it combines features of the teacher-centered and more student-centered models:

1. The tutor and student share equally in conversation, problem-solving, and decision-making.

2. Tutors identify problem areas and control the movement from one phase to the next.

3. The conference includes much general conversation about ideas, the course, and the student's composing process. The tutor generally ends such conversation by relating it to the student's revision.

4. The tutor and student often solve specific problems together.

5. The tutor leaves final decisions about the paper to the student.

6. The tutor sometimes switches to a more dominant role.

7. Tutors ask a mixture of open, probe and prompt, and closed questions. (A probe and prompt question asks for more detail (p. 67).)

(p. 297)

Six of Reigstad's ten subjects fit into the collaborative mold. Some of them pre-read papers while others read the draft silently in conference and sample student feeling about their work before commenting. This model appears conducive to what the Schmucks call "two-way communication," a valuable kind of learning for effecting behavioral change (I assume writing is a behavior). Though collaboration takes more time, they believe it produces better work.[50] It seems to me likely to succeed with the average minority student, who may find authority in the teacher-centered model and autonomy in the student-centered model equally threatening.

Reigstad's final model, the student-centered conference, comes from observation of Donald Murray and Hal Winslow. (Advocates of the tutorial method appear in all three groups: teacher-centered, Roger Garrison; collaborative, Thomas Newkirk; and student-centered, Donald Murray.) Because it forces the teacher to take a back seat, this model might be the hardest of the three for most teachers to follow for the length of the conference. Reigstad lists these features of the student-centered model:

1. The student does most of the talking while the teacher listens.

2. The student does most of the work.

3. The student determines the direction of the conference and the movement to the next phase.

4. Teachers ask mostly open and probe and prompt questions.

5. The student decides how to revise.

6. Teachers contribute personal experiences to help the students explore the subject. (pp. 297-9)

In my judgment, the student-centered model would be the least likely of the three to promote student dependency. Reigstad observed this model in action with upperclassmen in advanced writing courses, but its supporters do not mention any limits to its use. According to Carnicelli, it is the most common type of conference in freshman English at New Hampshire.[51]

Reigstad's subject, Donald Murray, who has written extensively about student-centered conferences, apparently follows his own recommendations. Perhaps he behaves so consistently because he has spent many years developing the techniques of the conference. In 1968 he wrote in A Writer Teaches Writing,

> before the teacher gives his own diagnosis, he should ask the student to volunteer a description of his own writing problems and listen to the student's answer . . . the teacher should assist the student in solving the problems he sees in his own writing.[52]

This statement fairly describes his present methods. Though in this earlier work he recommends conferences lasting three to ten minutes at least once a week,[53] the Murray conferences attended by Reigstad lasted an average of fifteen minutes. (The conferences recorded occurred with an advanced Non-Fiction Writing Course.) Murray confers with each student several times on each draft. Earlier we noted that in 1973 Murray and Lester Fisher published an article, "Perhaps the Professor Should Cut Class," describing

a course conducted entirely by office conference, without class meetings. Their students had to appear with the principal writing problem stated at the top of their drafts and their success in solving it evaluated at the bottom of the last page.[54] Thus the student came prepared to structure the session. Rita Gerber, Reigstad's co-worker, points to another goal in Murray's current process:

> Almost all of his questions are geared toward making the writers more aware of their own composing processes, and of what they've learned about composing from their writing. The questions Murray poses, no matter what the phrasing, essentially all ask the writer, "What did the writing teach you?" and "How do you feel about your draft and about how it has changed?" (p. 347)

Thus even as he helps the student decide how to revise the paper at hand, Murray also teaches him about writing itself. In this way the student supposedly becomes more able to cope with future writing tasks.

Other spokesmen for the student-centered conference include Charles Duke, Suzanne Jacobs, Adela Karliner, Charles Dawe, and Edward Dornan. In his 1975 article, "The Student-Centered Conference and the Writing Process," Duke argues that a non-directive approach frees the individual from anxiety that prevents him from solving his own problems.[55] He offers the teacher some strategies borrowed from counselling for use in writing conferences. Anyone interested in student-centered conferences should read this article in its entirety. In "The Writing Conference: A One-to-One Conversation," Carnicelli criticizes Duke for glossing over the difference between the writing teacher and the therapist. Whereas the therapist tries to help the

client clarify his own values, "The teacher's function is to lead the student to adopt the teacher's values, the common criteria of good writing shared by the teacher, the English profession, and with certain variations, educated people in general."[56] At first glance, this seems like a serious criticism of Duke. But fortunately for Carnicelli's argument, he does not define the common criteria of good writing shared "by educated people in general." At Garrison's workshop in 1978, Carnicelli created some stir by declaring that college courses should teach "academic writing." In his opinion, this sort of writing does not require study of voice, audience, style, or rhetorical strategy, but only the ability to present ideas.[57] The "New Rhetoric" of the last twenty years has so strenuously challenged this concept of writing that it seems false to describe it as universal. Suzanne Jacobs and Adela Karliner conducted an influential study in which they analyzed two tape-recorded teacher-student conferences and compared pre-conference and post-conference drafts of student papers. They concluded that a directive, teacher-centered approach works well when students need straight-forward advice on organization, grammar, or diction. However, they advised the teacher to shift the initiative to the student when he wishes to encourage major revision of the paper's content. To signal this shift, the teacher can ask open questions, summarize what the student has said, or take notes on the student's comments. This phase may be full of stumbling utterances, false starts, non-sequiturs or long pauses, but it results in more significant revisions in the final draft.[58] Follow-up studies have supported their conclusions (p. 37). In their recently published, <u>One-to-One: Resources for Conference-Centered Writing</u>, Dawe and Dornan recommend a non-directive opening for the tutorial conference. They hope to train the student to make the first comment about the paper by asking questions, such as "How did it

go?" or "Did anything give you trouble?" In their opinion, such a process should encourage independence and self-evaluation.[59] The enthusiasm of the many advocates of student-centered conferencing suggests that teachers ought to find out if and how it serves their aims in the writing conference.

Beside the three types of conferences identified by Reigstad, several others have been advanced for use either in combination with "the big three" or instead of them. They include the social work model, the reader-centered model, and some radical substitutes. Proposed in 1977 by Rosemarie Arbur, the social work model divides the conference into seven stages that serve to make it pleasant and fruitful for the student. Her analysis strikes me as valuable largely to the new tutor who has little feel for handling people. For instance, the first stage, engagement, deals with greeting the student courteously and seating him so that he can look at the paper with the tutor. Termination includes an expression of confidence in the student's ability to revise the work successfully.[60] However, no one can afford to ignore her point that the conference demands concern for the student's feelings. The reader-centered model could be used in most other types of conferences as a questioning technique. The student reads his paper to the tutor, who poses as a typical reader and interrupts the student whenever his comprehension falters due to lack of transition, undefined terms, contradictory statements, or any other flaw in the explanation that would trip up someone trying to follow the writer's line of thought. When the tutor asks the question that would come to the reader's mind at that point, the student must explain in his own words what he tried to say on the paper. When he finally makes himself clear, the tutor tells him to jot down those words for use in revision, and the reading continues. Close to the procedure of the Oxford tutorial, this strategy serves the student best when he has a fair draft already but would be useless

during pre-writing or with an unfocused draft. As Walker Gibson explains, the teacher uses this strategy to dramatize for the student how "dumb" the reader remains because he cannot read the writer's mind but can only respond to what is down on the page.[61] Widely accepted, this reader-centered strategy has become a key feature in the tutorials of Dick Harrington at Piedmont Virginia Community College. Most radical of all writers on the conference, Peter Schiff offers a set of strategies that might succeed with students whose verbal or emotional handicaps prevent their progress in one of the standard conferences:

1. The teacher invites the student to watch him at various stages of the writing process.

2. The student and teacher exchange journal entries describing specific classes.

3. The student and teacher work together on revising each other's free writing.

4. The student reads his paper to a tape-recorder, plays it back, and then tries to revise.

5. The teacher promotes a discussion on a controversial topic between two students in order to stimulate their thinking for a paper on that subject.

Schiff feels these strategies can be adapted for five to ten minute sessions.[62] In general he believes that teachers take for granted the value of the traditional course conference in raising the quality of writing, when in fact there is little hard evidence in its favor.[63] His recent studies offer some support for the value of the conference in reducing anxiety, however.[64]

So far in this treatment of conference strategy, I have tried to

contrast the methods teachers use to help a student in a one-to-one session. Unfortunately, this intent hides the points of consensus among Piedmont teachers and most writers on the subject. When I found a list of such points in Reigstad's thesis and compared it with one of my own, the two essentially agreed. This agreement leads me to present the following list of conferencing principles so that the teacher can compare it to his own. He may also note the similarity of some of these principles to those Moore tells us are basic to the English tutorial.

1. The teacher should have a conscious strategy. Teachers will do a better job in the conference if they think about what they are doing and acquire alternatives to their usual approach for use in special cases.

2. The tone of the conference should be informal, relaxed, and non-threatening. As Ellen Nold has said, ". . . the tutorial is a highly social event."[65] The teacher should address the student by his first name and make every possible effort to be helpful, accepting, and genuinely interested in the student's work. If time allows, he may spend some time getting acquainted by learning the student's interests and hobbies. The student should not get the feeling he is there to be scolded or ridiculed. Even Reigstad's most teacher-centered conferences shared this friendly tone. Two Piedmont teachers added that the tutor's "body language" should support the tutor's helpful stance. Most tutors sit next to the student to bolster the sense of working together on a common problem. Reigstad's subjects faced the students, but with shy or self-conscious writers, many teachers find it better at first for both to face the paper itself.

3. The conference should be individualized. It should deal with the student in language that is clear to him and at his level of comprehension. When the student leaves, he should have a concrete idea of how to

revise or complete his work.

4. The teacher's role should be flexible. According to the nature of the problem under discussion, a tutor may adopt any one of the roles observed by Reigstad: expert, rule-giver, evaluator, initiator, interested reader, partner in writing, or listener (p. 281). All of Reigstad's subjects played at least four different roles during the four conferences he observed.

5. In contrast to the traditional once-a-semester practice, conferences should be frequent and provide feedback on a paper before the final draft. The tutorial classroom, where the teacher meets with the student repeatedly during the writing process, comes closest to the ideal in this respect. Donald Murray sets the minimum frequency at once a week.[66]

6. The conference should encourage the student, whatever his present writing performance. Some writers feel that the act of holding the conference itself provides a form of encouragement. Charles Cooper tells us, "Personal response always seems more supportive than impersonal, distanced written comments or corrections."[67] While teachers vary in the amount of praise they will give weak writing, the old-fashioned approach of "taking the student down" on the grounds that his over-confidence bars improvement has lapsed. Teachers have swung toward Thomas Newkirk's view that "students learn more by being shown what they are doing well than by being shown what they are doing poorly."[68] Today the profession largely agrees that the poorer the writer, the more gently the teacher must tread. According to Sidney Rauch, the student with a record of failure or one outside the cultural mainstream "needs success, and he needs someone who will provide and recognize success for him."[69] If the teacher can find nothing else to praise, he can remark on some connection between the student's material and his own experience. Instead of contrasting the student's work with some

ideal professional model, the teacher should suggest improvements that this student will be able to make.

7. The conference should center on a sample of the student's own writing, referring to principles and methods only when they relate to the problems in the paper itself. Whether or not the student's paper is read before the conference, it properly serves as the focus.

8. Whoever directs the conference, teacher or student, should look for the central or most general problem in the paper and direct attention to it until it is solved. Even the longest conferences Reigstad observed (up to 60 minutes) spent the major part of the time on one or two central problems (p. 283). The Garrison method promotes such focus by providing areas of priority concern at each stage of the writing process. This approach offers most guidance to the beginning teacher who wishes to know what kind of problem to emphasize at any specific conference. Newkirk offers a list of useful questions to ask about student work at each stage.[70]

9. The tutor should write. Students of the conference increasingly stress the value of the tutor's reference to his own writing. They contend that students follow the teacher's recommendations more willingly when they seem to come from a fellow writer. Since all of Reigstad's subjects are professional writers, it seems natural that they referred frequently to their own problems when guiding the student. But teachers who do not publish also seem to enhance their roles by presenting themselves as writers. Many teachers now write in the classroom or distribute samples of their own writing to students to underline this role. One of the students Reigstad interviewed showed the importance she attached to the teacher as a writer when she declared, "I'm not going to spend one hundred-sixty dollars to have someone teach me what they don't do. If you've never done any writing, I don't think

you should teach it" (p. 305). Teachers can help remove any doubts about their competency by referring freely to their own writing efforts during the conference.

10. The conference should involve the student. Most published work on conferencing urges the teacher to expand the student's part in the conference. Though as Reigstad learned, tutors who conduct teacher-centered conferences still do most of the talking, the trend appears to be in the other direction. One argument for this trend comes from the way a conference in which the teacher does most of the talking squanders the principal asset of the tutorial. The more he talks, the less the tutor learns about the student and thus the less he can adjust his strategy to the individual. Also, those who discourage the teacher from rewriting the student's sentences or rearranging his ideas for him in an attempt to "model" good writing feel that such modeling too often gets out of hand. The student then learns to wait for the teacher to tell him what to do and never masters the art of spotting and solving his own problems. The best way to increase student participation involves using more questions than statements of explanation. Donald Murray shifts the burden of analysis to the student by the use of open questions:

> What did you learn from this piece of writing?
> What do you intend to do in the next draft?
> What surprised you in this draft?
> Where is this piece of writing taking you?
> What do you like best in this piece of writing?
> What questions do you have of me?[71]

Be repeatedly asking these questions, Murray trains the student to ask them of himself before the conference and to take the lead during the conference

itself. While the student should be doing more of the talking, he generally should be talking about his writing rather than unrelated personal problems, in the view of most teachers at Piedmont and elsewhere. Putting the student in the driver's seat may slow the pace or even lead to periods of silence, but to advocates of the student-centered conference, the gains appear to outweigh the losses. As noted above, Jacobs and Karliner feel that the greatest gain in the increased student role comes from the more complete revision that the student will tend to make. Deanna Gutschow urges more teacher-student discussion to mimic and inspire the kind of self-critical internal dialogue in student writers characteristic of skilled, professional ones.[72] In the same vein, Charles Duke states, "the /goal/ of the writing conference is to help the student reach the point where he feels comfortable talking about his writing, and where he becomes willing to examine it on his own, inside and outside the conference environment."[73] Self criticism fortunately carries little of the dampening effect of criticism by someone else.[74]

The impressive amount of agreement on these ten points about conferencing begs for explanation. Does it result from the mutual confirmation of independent experience in a wide range of conference situations? Or does it testify to the influence of a small, persuasive group whose ideas have gained general currency? Certainly the work of the New England group, including Murray, Garrison, Fisher, Newkirk, and Duke, has stirred the current interest in and analysis of conference strategies. Whether this vogue will have long-term effects on actual practice will finally depend on how much the experience of thousands of teachers supports the advice of these leaders.

Section III.

Evaluation of the Tutorial Classroom

Does the tutorial method teach today's freshmen to write better than other methods now in use? True, we read testimony in its favor in a range of current professional publications. But any detached observer could suggest reasons why teachers might sincerely testify that the method produces better writing when in fact it does not. Perhaps the teacher has fallen under the influence of a persuasive proponent of the method. Or perhaps he has invested so much psychic energy in developing the method that he cannot see its flaws. Or perhaps its apparent success results from conditions independent of the method itself. So far we lack objective, quantitative proof of the superiority of the tutorial approach. Those studies which have sought such proof, like the Los Angeles Community College District Study, fall short of this goal. That study, the most ambitious to date, fails to rule out the chance that the better writing in the tutorial classroom it documents results from the experimental effect. A basic concept in social science research recognizes that improved performance may follow the relief from routine and extra attention that any experiment provides. Improvement does not guarantee that the method being tested caused the difference. Only if the control group at Los Angeles had enjoyed exactly the same conditions as the experimental group except for the teaching method, would the role of the method be proved. But the experimental group was staffed by volunteer teachers, whereas some of the control teachers were chosen by the time of the class. The experimental group also had a larger number of professionals per class than the control group. We cannot rule out the critical importance of these factors.[75] Thus, at the moment there

exists no body of research adequate to justify adoption of the tutorial method.

However, if adoption of any teaching method waited for objective proof of its superiority, educational development would stagnate. After all, we have no objective evidence in support of most existing practices, either. Though highly desirable, such proof demands the expenditure of much money and time. In a later section we will consider some ways to begin collecting data. But about all anyone can do now is to examine the arguments for and against the tutorial method to decide whether, in the light of his own values and priorities, one set outweighs the other. Unfortunately, this decision must be made anew for each situation where this method is proposed. The following discussion of the declared advantages and disadvantages of the tutorial classroom attempts to help those faced with such a decision.

Garrison and his supporters have stacked up abundant arguments for their side. First on everyone's list comes the finer adjustment to individual differences possible in the one-to-one set-up. As one of Thomas Reigstad's subjects, Diana Hume George, declared, "You don't get at the person and the person's way of thinking and way of writing in the group context as readily as you do in the conferencing context" (p. 118). Because he can learn more about the student in a one-to-one encounter, the tutor can tune his manner, topic, and level of explanation to the specific needs and personality of each student to an extent impossible when dealing with a whole class at once. In addition, the able student in the tutorial classroom need never again sit through explanations of material he already knows. Conversely, the student below the class level can hear what he does not know explained in words pitched to his glove. Like the English tutorial, the tutorial classroom offers this key advantage over other existing ways of teaching.

Then, too, a tutor's oral comments will be more clear, detailed, and persuasive than the marginal notes or final summary of an equally articulate teacher. As Sue Wheeler told Reigstad, "You can't just make a note on somebody's paper and say, 'this is a good moment, expand,' unless you've talked about why it's a good moment" (p. 262). Moreover, a teacher often forgets that his handwriting might tax a cryptographer, or that the notes he regards as incisive just don't make sense to the student because they assume the student knows more than he actually does. As a tutor in The Writing Center, I find myself spending much time explaining what I think the teacher meant by the written comments on graded compositions. As a graduate student I have the nerve to pursue my professors until they clarify orally the average of two or three comments per paper I don't understand. But when I ask these undergraduates whether they have asked the teacher, they shake their heads. In one case I sent the freshman back to his instructor because I didn't understand the comment either. He was told not to worry because it wasn't important. While oral comments lack the permanence of written ones, the tutor can make notes of key points for the student or have the student do it himself. In contrast to the situation of written comment, in a tutorial the teacher's comments arrive packaged with clarifying tone and gesture, and the student's expression or puzzled question shows the tutor when his comments need elaboration. As Ellen Nold explains, "The heart of great teaching, questioning is best practiced in tutorial dialogue, not in marginalia."[76] In his recent article on the writing conference, Thomas Carnicelli quotes from a student course evaluation: "The instructor can comment all he wants, but the corrections don't come to life until he shows you exactly what he means in conference."[77] If the tutor remains unsure that he has made his point, he can ask the student on the spot. The

conference also gives the student a chance to defend his work and perhaps persuade the teacher that the comment is unjust. Thus the oral feedback of the tutorial flows in two directions, helping the teacher refine his powers of criticism and explanation as well as guiding the student to full understanding.

Another plus in the workshop classroom results from the difference between talking about writing and actually doing it. "Unfortunately, any whole class discussion must be of a general nature while every piece of writing is in some sense unique," Dick Harrington points out. Only by dealing with a specific piece of writing can many beginning student writers see the application of the general point to the specific case. For them, whole class instruction does not have the same impact as actual practice in writing. After a survey of 1800 freshman writing course student evaluations prepared at the University of New Hampshire, Carnicelli concludes

> While many different activities were used in the classes, not one was singled out as especially helpful, not even class discussions of student papers--by far our most common classroom activity. Students seemed to perceive all class activities as devoted to 'writing in general' and found none of them directly relevant to their individual writing problems.[78]

By the time he gets around to writing, the student often forgets what was said in class or does not know just where to apply it. However, the tutor can supply the principle at just the right moment.

The student may also benefit from the contrast between the emotional environment in a one-to-one workshop and that in the classroom. In the

classroom he feels his ideas and responses meet instant scrutiny from a group of peers, most of whom he hardly knows. Many shy students will not respond at all in such a situation. As one of Carnicelli's subjects wrote, "Here in conference you can discuss your writing alone with the teacher. You don't have to fear criticism from other students."[79] In today's classes, where students have much less in common than twenty-five years ago, this difference may provide the margin of success with many students.

Furthermore, reports from tutorial classrooms tell us that teacher morale climbs because the paper load drops. I have heard a few teachers say they enjoy reading and writing comments on papers. But the tenor of published writing in such anthologies as How to Handle the Paper Load[80] suggests that the majority of teachers feel that correcting and grading takes too much time and saps energy needed for creative teaching. Carnicelli agrees: "It is the task of reading papers at home that is the real time-killer in traditional course formats."[81] As already noted, in the prospectus for his summer institute, Garrison boasts, "using the methods practiced at the Institute, teachers discover that they never again have to take home papers to be corrected."[82] The underlining indicates the strong appeal of this aspect of the method. Carnicelli (a teacher at the institute) backs this claim: ". . . for the teacher who has the skill and energy to use it, the Garrison format is the least time-consuming way of teaching writing effectively."[83] Though the University of New Hampshire, where Carnicelli holds a post, uses a format that includes more full-class instruction than Garrison's as well as his heavy emphasis on conferences, the actual time spent in reading papers remains well below that of traditional writing instruction. (Like almost all the teachers at Piedmont, he feels one-to-one work with students is more effective than writing comments on papers and

thus more satisfying.)

In addition, supporters point to the increase of timely feedback provided by the tutorial method. In Garrison's classroom the student must gain approval from the teacher upon completion of each stage of the writing process (including at least two pre-drafting stages) before beginning the next. As a result, the student gets regular help when he can use it best. And he is more willing to revise his work in line with such feedback because it comes without the sting of a grade and before he has invested the amount of time and ego required by a completed paper. Some critics doubt that the average tutor can give accurate feedback after the rapid survey of the paper demanded by the classroom tutorial. In response, advocates point out that a freshman essay should be short and that the tutor reads it repeatedly from its earliest stages. Usually the contents lack complex reasoning or novel ideas. In the case of the occasional long paper, each tutorial can focus on individual sections. (Readers should keep in mind that this paper deals with the tutorial method in freshman composition class.) When properly applied, the tutorial method requires the teacher to focus on just those features of writing that are related to the stage of composition that the student has reached. Teacher interviews and my own experience confirm that this skill matures quickly under combat conditions. Students readily learn the value of such feedback and gain confidence in their work from approval of early stages.

Also to its credit, the far greater demand for drafting and redrafting in the tutorial classroom as compared to the more common type of freshman writing course calls the student's attention to many of the spelling, sentence, and mechanical errors that normally pepper a first draft. These errors occur blatantly in submitted papers in the traditional writing course because students so often turn in what amounts to a first draft. In The Writing Center

one co-ed showed me a typed paper she planned to hand in that afternoon. Its many distracting small errors swamped her message. When told she should use the remaining hour before the deadline to clean up those errors and re-type the paper, she set to work and did just that. With small extra effort she found and fixed almost all of them herself. This incident betrays her lack of training in writing as a process, with separate tasks at different stages. Too often the grind of marking papers results from our failure to show students that finished writing never flows from the pen as a complete product: it must be reviewed and revised. The tutorial method, more than any other, provides the student with the most obvious opportunity to learn this lesson.

Experienced teachers remain skeptical of a method that claims to lack disadvantages, yet few published accounts go into disadvantages at all. One reason for this neglect may be that to a true believer certain outcomes that disturb others may appear trivial or even desirable. For example, one Piedmont teacher, experienced in "current traditional rhetoric," pointed out that by omitting full-class discussion of ideas in model essays, the tutorial method curtails the role of freshman English in providing "liberal education." She notes, however, that one may question whether this role really belongs to a writing course or whether it would be successful with a group of students having such diverse backgrounds and experience as a typical community college class. On the other hand, speaking in his office at the university, Professor L.A. Beaurline calls this curtailment the most serious drawback of the workshop classroom. Though some Piedmont teachers include writing in response to published essays in the second quarter of the composition class, such essays do not form the backbone of the composition instruction there as in many traditional classrooms. (At Piedmont they do play a larger role in the third

quarter, which provides an introduction to literature.) Certainly students in Garrison's workshop do not have much chance to discuss, argue, compromise, or speak with their peers. How damning this feature appears will depend on how strongly the observer feels that such activities belong in a freshman composition course.

A more pressing disadvantage has already been sighted in the section quoted from Dawe and Dornan. The teacher must find a way to fill the gap in instruction left by reducing full-class time in favor of conferencing. Proponents argue that students do not gain as much from full-class time as they do from correcting errors or rewriting their own papers. While this may be true, sometimes students need more help in routine revision and correction than the teacher has time to give in tutorials. As already noted, many teachers try to fill the gap by referring students to texts or handbooks. However, the question remains whether students can or will learn such skills as the use of a comma or transitional devices as well from printed materials as they can from live, whole-class instruction (wasteful of good students' time as that may be).

Except in the Dawe-Dornan manuscript and the Project Literacy report, as far as I know no printed source even mentions what Piedmont teachers cite as a major problem, the impatient idleness of a student in the Garrison-type classroom waiting for help from a teacher because he does not know what to do next. While students at the community college level seldom become rowdy, those who are waiting usually chat with their neighbors and distract others trying to work. Some Piedmont teachers feel that informal peer conferences in the interval help augment teacher feedback. Project Literacy suggests keeping students working with skills practice such as sentence combining, journal writing, or group editing.[84] But all of these require a

degree of supervision or additional teacher time. Often students will see little reason for remaining in the classroom when they have finished their own conferences, especially if noise distracts them from writing. Teachers using the tutorial method must face this problem and develop a policy for handling it.

As another disadvantage, critics on the university faculty often remark that constant intervention by the teacher in the writing workshop makes students "too dependent." Garrison himself warns against doing the writing for the student and counsels gradual withdrawal by the teacher to avoid student dependency. All Piedmont teachers note this danger, and most try to reduce the amount of help they give as the course advances by encouraging the student himself to suggest improvements for his work. As already discussed, the question of avoiding dependency relates directly to conference strategy and should be one of the keys to the choice of such a strategy. Whether or not dependency can be entirely avoided in this method remains a point of dispute.

Scattered reports suggest that some timid or insecure students fear one-to-one sessions with a teacher. Having their writing read in their own presence makes them anxious.[85] Mary Hiatt voices the most outspoken criticism of the average conference in her article, "Students at Bay: The Myth of the Conference." She points out that poor students often come to the conference in such a defensive mood that they block out teacher comment and escape from this "threatening ordeal" as soon as possible.[86] Pamela Gay, an instructor at Old Dominion University experienced in work with anxious writers, notes that such students at times may feel "singled out" by the tutorial,[87] though I would guess that such a reaction would be more likely in a compulsory remedial writing center than in a class where all students have the same sort of tuition. Then too, the chill of eyeball-to-eyeball contact might be

written off against the warming effect of escape from peer scrutiny. Most tutors tell how they sit beside the student rather than facing him so that both can look at the paper and forget self-consciousness. Piedmont teachers report that students may proceed cautiously for the first few days but are soon drawn into talk about their own writing. According to one interview, "They don't know what to expect the first week. Here I am, sitting close to this teacher here. What's she going to do to me? What's she going to say to me? But within a week, they know." In other words, when the teacher can reassure the student, this disadvantage may be only temporary.

The concept of a workshop classroom may threaten teachers as well as students. It begins when they read Garrison's account of the teacher-tutor's role:

> When you work directly with one student after another, scanning their work swiftly and fairly to make an assessment, your attention has to be taut and unremitting--yet outwardly casual. You cannot relax into small talk or digressions, as you so easily can in a longer lecture or discussion.[88]

At once many doubt their own talent for spearing a student's key problem on first reading during a three-minute conference. Will they be put on the spot, without a sensible word to say? I have heard even graduate students in the doctoral program at the University of Virginia raise this specter. Yet none of the Piedmont teachers mentioned being stumped as a common or serious problem. One of them told me that if he has no concrete solution, he simply tells the student to go back and try out some new way of wording his ideas until he comes up with something that works. Another instructor handles

problems that demand more thought than a classroom tutorial allows by asking students to come in during office hours. Charles Duke feels student-centered conferences provide the answer:

> If the conference is truly student-centered and non-directive, the student already will know at least some of his problems and will be ready to discuss them; from such preliminary discussion it is only a short step to isolating and concentrating upon the major problem.[89]

However, some critics remain unconvinced. Moreover, because the workshop classroom differs so much from their past experience, many teachers wonder if they are really teaching when they enter a classroom without a lesson plan or lecture outline. They see their primary role as purveyors of information and suffer a vague sense of guilt when they step out of that role. One teacher at Piedmont worries that the students will feel she fills a soft berth. On a teacher evaluation form, in answer to the question, "Does the teacher seem prepared?" one student wrote, "Well, it seems to me that you don't have to do a lot of work." As a result this teacher tries to spend a bit of every class presenting some prepared material about writing to the whole group. If this fear of abandoning a structured format bothers one of the most energetic and self-confident of the Piedmont teachers, I imagine that many others share it. The tutorial method does force the teacher to review his skills and alter his primary role in the classroom.

A more theoretical disadvantage arises from the "New Classicist" idea of writing as a craft. Some rhetoricians reject outright any linear model of composition. But short, effective tutorials depend on the concept of writing as a process with distinct stages. With this concept both teacher

and student know the main job at any point and can ignore other problems until it is finished. Garrison himself sees this sort of intervention as the key to his method, and Piedmont teachers agreed. However, to those who reject this approach to writing, its presence in the tutorial method remains a severe disadvantage. We note such a view when Peter Elbow declares:

> The most appropriate path for learning to write is <u>not</u> to try to break up the skill into its ideal progression of components which can be learned one at a time, but rather to try to set up some situation in which the learner can persevere in working at the whole skill in its global complexity.[90]

Theorists who stress the recursive complexity of the composing process often point to the unconscious elements at work. Richard Young labels those of this persuasion, "New Romantics" and describes their outlook as a combination of late eighteenth-century vitalism and modern psychology. They insist that rational aspects of mental life are no more in touch with reality than the irrational, and that excessive rationality impedes thought.[91] Sondra Perl writes in this vein:

> After observing the process for a long time we may . . . conclude that at any given moment the process is more complex than anything we are aware of; yet such insights, I believe, are important. They show us the fallacy of reducing the composing process to a simple linear scheme and they leave us with the potential for creating even

more powerful ways of understanding composing.[92]

Young feels that both the New Romantics and the New Classicists are partly right, and that the teacher should take advantage of strategies developed by both groups.[93] Certainly users of the tutorial method should avoid a dogmatic stance about the composing process. Piedmont teachers point out that the number and naming of the steps is arguable, and Garrison concedes, "Obviously in practice they overlap and are not separated in as clear-cut a way as they have been presented here."[94] While it is well to avoid oversimplifying the ways writers work, at the freshman level a linear model may actually deepen the student's sense of the complexity of writing. Too many of them approach the task as a one-shot effort, a burst of energy that produces a final product. Moreover, stress on spontaneity and insight without giving the student a sense that his work is moving toward completion would only discourage most freshmen. Every tutor sees students who buck the staged approach to writing, and sooner or later he must decide how he wishes to handle this resistance, which reduces the efficiency of the tutorial and the student's learning about the writing process. On the other hand, Fisher and Murray contend that the staged approach leads students "to experience the logical process of discovery of meaning through a sequence of drafts which most writers find necessary and exciting."[95] Strong individualists who oppose all sorts of systematization will probably always find Garrison's method too rigid. Professor Kolb points out that a good tutor should be able to make the stages fit the student. This issue appears to be another one of those disadvantages proponents regard as quibbling and critics perceive as crucial.

As a more generally remarked disadvantage, most teachers report a strain and exhaustion in the tutorial classroom greater than they have known

in other settings. Probably this strain results from the need to make quick decisions about student work and explain them concisely to individual members of a very mixed group. Crowded and noisy classrooms make the strain worse. If the teacher tries to give all tutorials during class time, he will certainly feel the pressure. If he holds long office hours instead, the extended contact with students may be equally tiring. While "the first year is the hardest," according to Piedmont teachers, the tutorial classroom will probably always be rough for some.

One disadvantage remains limited to courses that closely imitate Garrison's attitude toward paper deadlines. Such tutorial set-ups, including that existing during the first years at Piedmont, permit the student to work at his own speed as long as he completes a certain number of papers during the term. At Piedmont this policy has in the past let some students fall hopelessly behind. A few teachers there now have daily schedules showing students exactly what they should be doing at all parts of the course. (Unfortunately, circumstances usually dictate frequent revision of such schedules.) There are also teachers who insist that the student must learn to keep up the pace as part of his training in higher education. But most teachers and administrators refuse to accept a high failure or drop-out rate, and to the sinking student, such a liberal policy must seem a fatal disadvantage.

Some critics also attack the tutorial classroom for isolating the students from each other. If the one-to-one relationship dominates the course, two kinds of complaints apply. The first springs from the current theory that human interaction forms the basis of all <u>significant</u> learning, or that learning which has meaning to the learner and changes his behavior.[96] Therefore, the classroom should encourage its members to interact as fully

as possible. To some extent Professor Beaurline's comment that the tutorial classroom cuts a student off from the ideas of his peers reflects this concept of learning. A lack of class identity or cohesion noticed by Piedmont teachers also adds to the problem of convincing students that time spent in the classroom before or after their own tutorials has real value. A second complaint concerns the sense of audience of the writer. A student who always writes with the teacher-tutor in mind may miss the need to shift his tone, diction, or voice to meet the needs of his readers. He thus fails to learn how to write for a non-academic situation. As noted, Garrison attacks traditional courses for being "teacher-oriented," but his exclusive use of teacher-student tutorials leaves him open to the same charge. Reigstad's description of Garrison's tutorials as teacher-centered also lends substance to the complaint. These criticisms springing from the problem of student isolation have prodded a growing number of teachers to widen the tutorial experience to include a practice that will receive detailed attention in the next section of this paper, peer critiquing in small groups.

By now we can see how many issues bob to the surface when we try to dredge up the truth about the tutorial method. There are still more. When we ask, "Does the tutorial method teach today's freshmen to write better than other methods now in use?" we presume that "better" is a known quantity. Yet there exists no universal standard for gauging writing, and if there did, no two teachers would be likely to apply it in exactly the same way. The Los Angeles study forced a choice of methods for evaluating student essays, holistic scoring, that might fail to satisfy other faculties. Moreover, when we try to weigh advantages and disadvantages, we immediately run into the problem of which classification any given outcome falls into,

or even whether it inevitably occurs in every tutorial classroom. When I explained to one teacher that the tutorial classroom might be criticized for lack of student interaction, he replied, "My experience was that I couldn't get them to stop interacting!" Then too, a disadvantage that would daunt one teacher, such as the problem of dependency, might appear easily avoidable to another. (This difference in perception actually occurred in the Piedmont interviews.) Months of pondering these issues have failed to bring me any closer to definite answers.

However, to many teachers and administrators the tutorial approach seems highly appropriate for the clientele of the community college. As I have observed first-hand, the one-to-one contact permits adaptation to the vast individual differences in ability and preparation among the student body there. Because of former unhappy experiences in school, many of these students also need the detailed guidance and support dispensed by the tutor in regular, rich doses. The community college student's frequent lack of academic sophistication means that he needs a clear, specific model of the writing process that takes no former knowledge of writing for granted. With the requirement for staged approval in this method, he may grasp the realities of revision and correction for the first time. Finally, students with severe physical and mental handicaps may be more at ease with the privacy of the tutorial. With the continued growth of community colleges, the use of this method will almost certainly expand.

On the other hand, today many students with needs similar to those of typical community college students attend four-year colleges and universities. From the University of New Hampshire, where the teaching in freshman composition courses apparently falls within the definition of the conferencing method set up earlier, comes the message, "If a teaching

situation requires a choice between classes and conferences, classes should definitely go. . . . Not one of 1800 students found classes as useful as conferences."[97] Such words show that the teacher in any institution who wants to aid the widest possible range of students should give the tutorial method long and careful consideration.

Section IV.

Small Writing Groups in the Tutorial Classroom

Can the tutorial method find greater success wedded to the fashionable use of small writing groups in freshman composition courses? Admittedly, some teachers still see collaborative learning and one-to-one as two unrelated methods. Among the Piedmont faculty only four teachers regularly use peer groups larger than pairs, and one of them felt this practice amounted to a departure from the tutorial program. Yet there are historical and theoretical ties between these approaches. Both owe a large debt to James Moffett, whose contributions to the tutorial method have already been traced. In Teaching the Universe of Discourse, he urged teachers to divide the class into groups of four or five to exchange papers, read them, and then comment on each other's work. He felt that finding most common errors did not demand specialized knowledge, and that students would write better for each other than for the teacher. By providing a live audience, the peer groups could help the student overcome his basic problem, the naive assumption that all readers think and feel as he does.[98] For some reason Garrison and most of his early followers ignored this part of Moffett's advice. Two of Garrison's colleagues, Lester Fisher and Donald Murray, dismissed peer critiquing in their 1973 article.[99] Yet careful study of Garrison's key statement, "One-to-One," fails to turn up any serious conflict between

Moffett's proposal and Garrison's arguments for the tutorial classroom. Peers can deal with the same type of individualized assignments, they can provide feedback at any stage of the writing process, and they can learn the skills of editing and revision by suggesting improvements for each other's work. Moreover, articles by directors of peer tutoring programs frequently remark on the improvement of the tutor's own attitude and writing skills.[100] Small peer groups thus offer a natural means of expanding the amount and variety of feedback in the tutorial classroom while preserving the personalization and intimacy of one-to-one contact.

In this matter of intimacy, we should distinguish between small group peer comment and peer comment by a whole class, with our without the aid of the overhead projector. Though some teachers do not recognize it, to the student there is a sharp difference between the psychological effect of having 25-30 people dealing with his paper and that of sharing it with a few. In a recent University of Virginia composition class featuring small groups, the teacher, Stephen Railton, asked whether anyone had ever attended a course using writing groups before. One of the students answered, "Yes, but the groups were large, and it didn't work very well." As this student indicated, to a significant degree the small writing group keeps the reassuring quality of the one-to-one conference, and present methods of training these groups preserve this rapport. Thus the use of small writing groups to supplement one-to-one conferences differs in key ways from the use of large groups or whole-class instruction.

If small groups can provide so many of the advantages of the tutorial classroom, why not abandon frequent teacher-student conferences entirely? For several reasons, I feel the optimal arrangement uses both. At least in the beginning, a few students may resent reading their papers even to a

a small group of peers (though this did not happen in the class just cited), and in that case, in the view of Moffett and others, they should continue conferring with the teacher or working in pairs.[101] Another reason for retaining both forms of feedback lies in the need for a counter to student comments that occasionally misguide the writers. As examples, I submit two cases from my recent sharing in a writing group. In contrasting nineteenth-century quiet on the University Lawn with twentieth-century racket, the freshman writer mentioned the popping of small pistols used by nineteenth-century students. As a fellow writer, I raised the question whether his detail really supported the impression of relative quiet he wanted to create. But other students in the group disagreed and urged him to keep that quaint and colorful detail. In a review of the teacher's comments on the final draft, I saw that he too had objected to the jarring mention of the pistols favored by the other students. Again, in commenting on one of my own papers, a student pointed out a pronoun without a clear referrent in the first paragraph. That pronoun served as part of a well-worn narrative device for arousing reader interest. Convinced I was on firm ground, I ignored the objection. When the final draft came back from the teacher, he had circled the pronouns and written, "I like the way you arouse my curiosity." (I apologize for using two examples flattering to myself, but they were the easiest to explain.) Thus, though student comments generally make sense and seldom mislead the writer so seriously, they should not remain the final word in the classroom. (When Railton heard what I had written in this paragraph, he defended the writing group by saying that teachers often make misguided comments also, especially when they rely on time-worn maxims like "every pronoun must have a clear antecedent." In his opinion, many times student comments are wrong only because they are trying to apply such

maxims in the fashion of their former teachers. Such teachers did not take into account the context when judging parts of student work. In response, I would add that since neither teachers nor students are infallible, the combination of peer and teacher feedback in the tutorial classroom makes all the more sense.) Some teachers who use writing groups, including Railton, supplement peer comment with detailed written comment on the final drafts. Though he does a superior job as reader and editor, an oral tutorial would offer the student a chance to respond to the occasional misreading that no teacher can totally avoid. In Errors and Expectations Mina Shaughnessy notes one way that the addition of collaborative learning to the tutorial classroom could help the teacher be a more effective tutor:

> One of the great values of the decentralized classroom where students participate as teachers as well as learners is that it opens up the students' secret files of misinformation, confusion, humor and linguistic insight to an extent that is not often possible in the traditional setting. However committed teachers are to starting from "scratch" they often have difficulty deciding where "scratch" is without this kind of help from their students.[102]

In short, the variety provided by the mixture of the two kinds of tutorials should enhance both.

If we grant the argument that the two methods combined have more value than either alone, we meet the question, How should student-teacher contact time be assigned to the two activities? Supporting the joint use of one-to-one tutorials and small groups in a 1977 work entitled A Laboratory

Approach to Writing, Carol Feiser Laque and Phyllis Sherwood suggest use of small groups in class time, reserving all but the briefest one-to-one encounters for office conferences.[103] On the other hand, Dick Harrington now carries on both activities at once in his community college classroom. Though he feels he has not yet found the ideal combination, one solution that appears promising to me would be for teachers to work for one-third to one-half of total class time with students one-to-one on the really knotty problems spotted by the writing groups. Meanwhile, the other students could be revising the routine problems in their drafts identified by their peers. The teacher could thus serve as professional consultant in cases where the students really need such advice. However, as far as I can judge, this question has received little attention in print.

The small writing group not only blends with the tutorial classroom but also reduces some of the more common problems of that classroom. While it would be foolish to think of peer groups as a panacea, they can counteract a number of those difficulties discussed earlier.

First of all, simply by providing a second source of comment on student writing, peer groups relieve the pressure on teacher time and energy. For instance, small groups working together at the invention stage of a personal experience narrative could prod their members to recall more details by asking questions like, "What did you hear?" What did you see?" This kind of probing with each member of a class can devour a lot of time and tire a teacher quickly, but it requires no skills lacking to any college freshman. While small groups are doing this job, the teacher can be tutoring the one or two students who have not yet been able to locate anything to write about or the real self-starter who comes to class with pages crowded with sharp details and now seeks a focus. In this way

members of small groups can help each other with routine tasks while the teacher deals with tough problems, relaxed by the sense that the rest of the class is doing useful work and doesn't need him at the moment.

In addition, the writing group can supply an element missing from the one-to-one classroom, no matter how efficiently the tutor deals with a mass of writing problems. The use of peer groups enlists peer pressure in its most useful form. As Marcia Silver puts it

> Probably the single most important condition for teaching writing is the willingness on the part of the student to accept criticism and grow as a result of it. A consensus of peer criticism is often more influential than the single opinion of a teacher. If several people have difficulty understanding what you have written, the odds are that you have not made your ideas clear.[104]

While a student sometimes understands what the teacher means by comments on his papers, he may lack the spark of motivation needed to boost him over the hump towards actually working on his problem. The urging of a group of peers is sometimes enough to strike that spark. Moffett suggests that this process works partly because peers are more blunt than the teacher, who is afraid of wounding the student (at least in some cases).[105] This effect may seem to work against the value of the tutorial method noted earlier in creating a more encouraging emotional environment for the insecure student than the full class discussion. However, a carefully trained small peer group with whom the student has worked over a period of time presents a far different prospect than a classroom full of strangers. Properly used, the well-

documented potency of peer influence can become the teacher's strongest ally in improving writing.

How can small groups help avoid the dependency problem? This practice certainly must reduce student-teacher dependency by putting the small group in place of the teacher as the source of feedback at many points. But we might wonder whether this shift makes the student truly any more independent, since he might then expect his peers to find all his errors and make all the changes in his papers. Probably the student tends less to fall into this trap with other students because his pride tells him that he has had about as much chance to learn to write as they. Whereas he cannot be expected to know as much as the teacher, he does not want other students to find him wrong very often. Thus small peer groups should counteract dependency by appealing to the student's ego.

Without doubt small groups also promise to solve some of the problems blamed on too little human interaction in the classroom. The most important of these problems remains the absence of the sense of audience. By constantly writing for the teacher, who usually knows more about the subject than he does, the student fails to learn how explicit the writer must be in normal situations, where the reader knows less about the subject than the writer. Moffett even maintains that <u>most</u> student errors in writing stem from failure to see what the reader needs to know.[106] In the small group, the writer will soon see the potholes in his roadbed when his peers point out the rough passage he has laid down for the reader. A blunt "What do you mean by that?" from his neighbor will soon sharpen the student's sense of the constant interrogation the reader makes of a text. When writing for his peers, the student works to communicate clearly rather than struggling to impress a superior so that he will receive a good grade. Small

groups also help the teacher overcome morale problems due to the relative isolation of the student in the one-to-one classroom. There can be no question in the student's mind that he must come to class and remain there in order to take part in peer group comment. One Piedmont teacher using small groups notes better attendance than when he used class time largely for one-to-one conferences. According to W.D. Memering, the sense of class identity missed by both teachers and students revives when students collaborate.[107] Moreover, because small groups demand that each student take part, shy students cannot retreat as they do in full-class discussion. Richard Gebhardt also feels that small group work reduces any anxiety generated by one-to-one contact because the student sees that others share his difficulties.[108] Finally, the close fellowship of a small peer group provides interaction that helps the student learn how to work courteously and productively with his peers in the kind of teamwork that may be basic to his own career. Use of the writing group must defuse all complaints that the tutorial classroom chokes off student-student learning.

In dealing with the disadvantages of the tutorial classroom, we also noted that in some programs, the absence of fixed deadlines encouraged by Garrison caused certain students to fall hopelessly behind. Small writing groups should deter procrastinators because they know that the others will be waiting to comment on their drafts. Thus, if their work fails to appear on the date assigned, they will lose face and a chance to glean useful hints for revision. In the composition class using writing groups mentioned before, the teacher recently showed the class the improvement between a student's first and final drafts. When asked where he got the ideas for his revision, the student gave major credit to his writing group. After one or two such occasions, students most probably will see why their first

drafts should be ready in time for group comment.

Though the combination of small writing groups and the one-to-one approach in the same classroom remains in the experimental stage, its potential persuades me that it can succeed. Therefore, I have included the following material on the organization, structure, and supervision of writing groups, as well as a number of ways to handle grading in this approach. This material seeks to serve those teachers who have small acquaintance with writing groups to gain a basic knowledge of their operation. However, as Railton recently told me, "The only way to get a feel for writing groups is to attend a class or workshop where your own writing becomes part of the discussion." Since joining his course, I have discovered many new elements of the method, and I recommend the same experience to others. Whether or not a teacher actually adopts the writing group technique, from working in such a class he will discover what sort of comments help the writer most in his struggle to engage the reader's mind. Meanwhile, I hope the information below will spark the reader's interest and lead him to seek a more direct involvement in a writing group.

Most students need careful orientation to writing groups. This need arises not only from lack of experience with groups, but also from counter pressures in American education and society. Donald Rothman feels students often hesitate to discuss their work with peers because the academic world treats knowledge as a form of private property.[109] Another problem may be the sense of peers as competitors created by the efforts of parents and teachers to motivate students. On the other hand, students may see criticizing their peers as a "form of betrayal."[110] Putting it bluntly, Kenneth Bruffee declares, "In being asked to learn collaboratively, they are being asked to do something their whole education has not only left them unequipped

to do, but has actually militated against."[111]

How can the teacher reverse the pressures of society against collaborative learning? Many experienced instructors urge that the course begin with some get-acquainted activity. Railton feels that the use of a large amount of class time for this purpose pays dividends. He suggests several approaches:

1. Have students interview each other in pairs for details about their past experience, personal hobbies, tastes, and individual traits. Then the interviewer presents his subject to the class.

2. Have each student in a writing group begin a story by writing for three minutes and then passing it on to the next. When all stories are completed, the students read them to each other and choose the best for reading to the whole class.

3. Have students free write for a few minutes, then read their free-write to the group.[112]

One Piedmont teacher reported that she has students spend the first class answering in writing a long list of questions about themselves and their writing. Then she reads this material at home and uses it to cue the students in class the next day when she has them introduce themselves. Another instructor has students all repeat their names and then has a contest to see who can memorize the names of the whole class first. Of course, these are only a few of the infinite number of possible activities.

Some teachers think they must promote self-disclosure in the classroom to prepare students for work in small groups. They press the student to overcome shyness by giving information about his personal life. They feel students will find this process easier if the teacher also discloses

details about his own personal life. One teacher uses a first writing assignment which directs the student, "Tell us about the deepest part of yourself," allotting twenty minutes for this purpose. Then the student must read the material he has written to the rest of the class, even under protest. The teacher also reads his own composition on the same subject."[113] In my opinion, requiring self-disclosure of this sort raises serious questions about the student's right to privacy and might cause some students to retreat rather than open up. Self-disclosure in the classroom should remain optional, with the student reserving the right to draw the line between his public and personal self.

Experience has shown that students do not automatically acquire a spirit of cooperation and consideration for the feelings of their fellow writers. Teachers must try to promote this spirit before students begin to confront each other's work. One teacher believes that the spirit must be renewed regularly throughout the course.[114] The class may develop some guidelines by having each member think about the ways he would like others to treat his own writing.[115] Railton recommends a practice session in which a student, using an essay supplied by the teacher, pretends to read his own paper. Pretending to be a fellow student, the teacher gives the kind of tactful, honest criticism that would help the student improve his paper. One teacher at Piedmont also reports good results from such role-playing. In the first session with writing produced by class members, the students can be limited to complimentary remarks about the papers, pointing to specific sentences or images they consider strong and effective. Later on, when they begin to make suggestions for improving the paper, they will have established the habit of praising first (p. 7). This habit will make group work more relaxed and the students more receptive to comment.

The teacher can head off or deal with student anger at having to read papers in a group by providing a chance for them to express their feelings. In a recent class session, Railton gave the students ten minutes to freewrite about the first writing group experience the day before. When they had finished, he asked for volunteers to read their papers. Half a dozen did so. Unanimously they reported initial anxiety about what the other students would say, but they also said that the experience had turned out much better than they had expected. In working with these same students during the following weeks, I met no sign of distaste for the writing group experience.

Orienting students to writing groups takes some extra time because so few students have worked this way before. But time spent in orientation seems to save time at later stages because the whole operation proceeds more smoothly as a result. Teachers who feel uncertain about details of student orientation may find that there are specialists in group process somewhere in their college who will be glad to help them develop effective techniques.

In addition to providing orientation, the teacher will have to make some decisions about the structure and composition of groups. Recommendations for the size of writing groups vary, perhaps because their mode of operation also varies somewhat. Irvin Peckham believes groups as large as ten work well[116] while at the other extreme, Daniel Fader, a secondary school teacher, prefers two or three,[117] and Pamela Gay, working with basic writers, agrees.[118] Most other sources suggest group sizes in the four to eight range. When each student reads a paper at each group meeting, a fifty-minute class will permit little time for discussion of each paper in groups larger than four. The composition of the group in regard to personality, type, sex, and

writing ability remains a matter of wider dispute. Drawing largely on personal preference, writers recommend that teachers group students on one of the following criteria:

1. Free choice (Edwards, Schmuck)
2. Common writing problem (Murray)
3. Cross section of class (Hawkins)
4. Random assignment (Hawley)
5. Mixture of high and low status members (Schmuck)
6. Even distribution of good writers (Railton, Loheyde)
7. Mixture and balance of sexes (Railton)
8. Separation of dominant and diffident students (Railton)

The range of these variations suggests that the teacher use whatever arrangement works best in his classroom. Some teachers like to keep one group working together for a whole quarter, even choosing a name, keeping a log, and appointing a chairman.[119] Railton feels that switching helps students see that different audiences respond to their writing in different ways. Decisions about group structure and composition can always be unmade and may depend somewhat on the goals the teacher sets for small group work.

While small groups maintain some autonomy, the teacher's role as supervisor remains critical in this method. In order to play this role, the teacher may need to reorient himself as well. Like students, teachers become locked into traditional patterns. In an article on collaborative learning, Kenneth Bruffee confesses, "It took me personally several years of wrestling with my own compulsion to teach as I was taught."[120] As with the one-to-one method, most teachers must adjust to a different role. In the writing group the teacher shares some of his authority with the students and permits them to teach each other without his constant intervention. According to Bruffee,

this sharing does not mean neglect of his duties by the teacher. "A teacher is not properly a donor, but a metteur en scene whose responsibility and privilege is to arrange optimum conditions for other people to learn."[121]

Teachers fill their revised roles in many different ways. In order to shed their traditional classroom identity, many teachers now assume a new one--that of fellow writer. They become a member of one of the small groups and bring their own drafts to the group for comment. One of Railton's students recently praised his act of "putting his writing on the line" as "really effective." This practice seems to gain student respect both for the quality of the teacher's writing and the humility it displays. ← Railton points out that this technique enables the teacher to work with those groups or individuals who have difficulty keeping themselves directed to the task at hand, without appearing to intrude. Completing the same assignment also gives the teacher a clearer sense of the problems involved and how to offer constructive help.[122] On the other hand, some teachers circulate from group to group or leave the room once the groups get started.[123] The teacher may act as a resource, offering on-the-spot help with problems that stump the writing groups, as Moffett recommends.[124] As already noted, this help may take the form of one-to-one tutorials. All these strategies aim to reduce teacher dominance in the classroom.

In his job of arranging the proper conditions for small group learning, the teacher must set some requirements. Members of the groups should sit in a circle, their chairs pushed close together to stress their common task, boost involvement in the mutual effort, and shut out distractions coming from other groups in the room. With some classes, the teacher may need to work with the class to develop explicit guidelines for behavior.[125] Next, he will need to outline clearly the specific tasks for each group meeting.

Teachers sometimes find small groups worthless because they have not given the students enough definite ideas about what they are supposed to do and how to do it. As a result, students tend to become bored, drift into random conversation, or feel confused and irritated. The teacher must also set and enforce time limits for the discussion of each paper so that all students will get equal time. Railton lists the names of group members on the board in the order that they should read their papers and makes the last student the time-keeper. Because he wants to assure the reading of his own paper, the time-keeper keeps everyone on schedule (p. 7). On the other hand, Railton insists that students keep talking about the paper for the full ten minutes, finding more to say by re-examining the paper if necessary. Students recognize the need for ground rules and expect the teacher to set the stage properly no matter what the method.

At every level of student ability, specific tasks remain the key to success with writing groups. These tasks require each student to respond with oral or written comment to some feature of his fellow student's paper. To help the students gain confidence and develop their ability to analyze writing, early tasks should be general and relatively simple, gradually becoming more complex. Every teacher will want to develop his own favorite set of tasks, but to show the kind of comment that student writers can give, I include some ideas devised by Railton, drawn from his ENWR 201 class and his paper on writing groups.

1. Have each student state the purpose of his paper in one sentence before meeting with the writing group. After he reads his paper (without comment) each of the other students writes down what he thought the writer's purpose was. Then all compare notes. Agreement between author and audience shows that the paper made its point fairly well. But strong disagreement

or confusion can serve as a basis for discussion of the paper.

2. Have each student list five things he hopes the group will notice about his paper. If the group does not notice them, he should ask why not. This exercise helps the student check his sense of the audience with the real audience.

3. As the paper is read, have each student underline sentences of a certain type, such as good sentences, bad sentences, or vivid sentences, and then have students see how well they agree and try to decide why the sentences fit each category.

4. Have each student read the paper with one characteristic of good writing in mind, such as clarity, coherence, or development. This topic then serves as a focus for discussion (pp. 14-19).

Some teachers report detailed tasks with numbered steps.[126] However, Railton warns against overly complex or highly structured tasks. In his opinion, group tasks that are too specific make peer comment too teacher-controlled and stifle spontaneity. Students need a starting point, but they should be able to find their own way from there on.[127] Specific tasks should forward two goals: first, they should help the writer see where he needs to revise his draft; and second, they should spotlight strengths in the paper from which other students ought to benefit.

Teachers who have succeeded with small groups offer a word of advice that applies to use of any new procedure: <u>persist</u>. Anyone who has tried to discuss a new method with experienced teachers has met the same response: "Oh, I tried that once and it didn't work!" The speaker offers such a statement as the final work on the subject, a verdict not subject to appeal. He ignores the chance that failure signalled his own lack of practice or the

students' slowness to adjust, rather than failure of the method itself. Before trying a method and hastily discarding it, teachers ought to do more than read an article or two and then spring the idea on their students. As already reported, Railton feels that every teacher should take part in a writing group experience before using it in his own classroom. Only when he has known the first anxious reading of his own writing to a group of peers can he help the student over this hurdle. If a teacher has no access to such a novitiate, he should at the very least consult at length with a teacher who has used writing groups. When he has carefully scouted the terrain ahead, he can advance his troops with confidence that persistence will take the field.

In the classroom featuring writing groups, the role of grading differs from teacher to teacher. To some extent school policy will limit the teacherer's options, but he usually has a degree of freedom. As already noted, with a strictly one-to-one classroom, Garrison recommends grading only at the end of the course, based on a number of papers selected by the student as his best work. His students learn early in the course how many papers they must submit as a minimum requirement for each letter grade. Since Piedmont Community College has required all students in the composition course to submit the same number of papers, grading there depends on the quality of the writing combined with the student's work on a final essay examination. Either of these practices would serve equally well in a course employing both one-to-one tutorials and writing groups. Since the aid given in the writing group remains general and advisory, there is no more reason to question the grading of writing done with this assistance than the grading of that done in the one-to-one classroom.

On the other hand, Irvin Peckham does not grade student writing at

all. His students aim to prepare a final piece of high-quality writing for the class anthology published and distributed to each class member at the end of the course. Their grades depend on the quality of the written comments on other students' writing which they regularly prepare. Students first comment orally on early drafts in small groups. Then they write comments about each of the final drafts and submit copies to both the other student and the teacher.[128] In such a grading situation the teacher might have to guard against the tendency on the part of the students to put more time and effort on the comments than on their own writing.

In the classes of Joseph Moore, effort determines the student's grade. He keeps a regular check on the student's folder, which contains both his own writing and his evaluations of the early drafts by other students. These evaluations consist of three sections:

1. A general comment on the meaning or interest of the essay.
2. A list of ten specific strengths of the essay.
3. Two suggestions for the improvement of the essay.

He comments to every student every three weeks about the quality of the work in the folder. In setting the final grade he declares,

> If a student's writing ability is poor, but that student completes every essay and evaluation, he or she deserves a high grade. The reason is simple: I can help students become better writers if they work hard . . . . I do not grade individual papers and do not read everything each student writes.[139]

In view of the common unreliability of grading applied to student writing, Moore's practice may serve as well as any.

Daniel Fader avoids grading any work prepared with the aid of the writing group. His writing groups take such an extensive role in revision of drafts that he requires all the members of the group to sign the completed paper. Though the writing group serves to improve the student's grasp of the writing process, he receives no direct aid on papers written for grading. Those papers result from assignments completed entirely by the individual.[130]

Carrying the mutual responsibility of the writing group a step further, Gene Stanford suggests giving one grade to the whole group. This grade rests on the average of all the grades for final drafts submitted by the writing group. According to his reading of research studies, classes do higher quality work when all the students get the same grade than when each person competes with others. In the small group a common grade spurs the better students to raise the level of their weaker fellows.[131] However, in a highly grade-conscious student body this technique would require skillful handling to prevent the best students from virtually doing the work for the weaker ones.

In deciding what form of grading works best with the use of one-to-one tutorial or writing groups, the teacher may conclude that these approaches present no grading problem essentially different from other methods. Deferred or spot grading of student writing has become routine in all sorts of composition courses. In the tutorial method as in any other, if the teacher wants to stress his role as partner in writing, he may want to submit papers from his classes for grading by another teacher in return for the same service for that teacher's students. (Such a switch requires that the participating teachers have similar goals and standards if the students are to be fairly judged.) According to current theory, when students receive regular comment on their work in lieu of grades, they tend to focus on areas

needing improvement rather than their standing in relation to their classmates, whatever the classroom organization.

Section V.

The Future of the Tutorial Classroom

Conclusion of this study tempts me to offer some guesses about the future of the tutorial method. Because this has been a part-time effort for less than a year, supported by my own limited resources and experience, my remarks hardly deserve the status of informed predictions. But until more competent, comprehensive work on this subject appears, my guesses will have to serve. To increase their credibility, I would like to review first present trends in the development of the tutorial method and the potential problems in its path before turning to what appears to me the general outlook for the method.

Despite widespread indifference, skepticism, and even hostility, the tutorial method has gained enough acceptance in the past decade to qualify as a nationally recognized method. True, it seems to arouse little interest among the higher echelon of rhetoricians (it has not yet made the program of the Detroit Rhetoric Seminar, an annual event featuring an eminent cast including Richard Young, Ross Winterowd, James Kenneavey, Janice Lauer, and Frank O'Hare). Moreover, some of its basic premises lack supporters, according to a recent survey of college English teachers. This survey showed that the great majority of teachers of writing in 31 institutions of higher learning reject two key concepts of the tutorial method: dealing with student errors by conference rather than marginal notation and selecting priority problems for immediate attention.[132] During discussion of the disadvantages

of the tutorial method, I have already noted other points of opposition to this approach. Yet the continued appearance of articles supporting it in major teacher journals, the current publication of the Dawe and Dornan text, and the investment devoted to studies of its effectiveness by systems like the Los Angeles Community College District testify to its continued appeal in all parts of the country.

The use of writing groups in the tutorial classroom promises to extend its acceptance. If innovative teachers can meld the strengths of collaborative learning with those of the Garrison method, they may find themselves masters of the freshman composition courses on most campuses. While teachers will probably combine these two ingredients in varying proportions, each of them has something essential to offer to the freshman composition course. As a new post-1960 generation of teachers with more training in the teaching of writing itself moves into control of college classrooms, I believe we will see closer supervision of all stages of the writing process and more emphasis on techniques such as one-to-one and peer comment to provide feedback and encouragement to the commonly anxious student writer. The old concept of the freshman writing course as a shake-down cruise or weeding-out process appears headed for the discard pile.

Along with growing acceptance, we now witness a search for some conclusive means of evaluating the tutorial method. Success inevitably breeds opposition, in response to which advocates seek convincing data. Up to recently proponents have relied almost entirely on personal testimony based on individual experience. As a result we have little systematic research. Such research as does exist has limited value. In a survey of research on conferencing found in Reigstad's thesis, he reports a number of studies with serious flaws in design. They are marred by too small a sample, a lack of

controls, or failure to isolate a single independent variable so that the observer can be sure just which feature of the teaching method produced the reported results.[133] Of course, no matter how good the research design, results from studies dealing with such a loosely defined method as the tutorial classroom will always be conclusive only for the form of the method with which the research dealt. Moreover, research involving enough students and teachers to measure the success of the tutorial classroom in improving student writing compared to other common methods would require more money than is likely to be available in the near future. The most practical way for individual teachers or system-wide programs to evaluate this method would be in terms of the kinds of performance for which the course is designed to prepare students. For instance, if the course exists to prepare students for writing assignments in other college courses, that performance should provide a means of evaluating the composition course. Perhaps the best approach would be comparison of papers written for other courses by matched pairs of students, one of which received writing instruction by the tutorial method and the other by some competing method. On the other hand, if the course intends to prepare the student for performance on some writing task required by his future vocation, samples of such writing by matched pairs of students would form a better basis for evaluation of the method. Regular evaluation of this type would meet local needs more economically than massive studies that may have limited application to other programs.

Though present trends in the development of the tutorial method cheer its supporters, a couple of uncertainties remain. First of all, when the tutorial method becomes the only method in the writing program at any college or university, teachers will have a new set of difficulties to resolve. In describing these problems I draw on the experience of the

faculty at Piedmont Virginia Community College, where the tutorial method has been used by all freshman composition teachers for six years. The first problem arises from teachers who dislike the method. For the first few years, the Piedmont group tried to maintain a uniform program where all classes followed the same schedule and used the same materials. During long and often wearing sessions, the group tried to adapt the Garrison approach to the local situation while remaining as close as possible to his recommendations. This process took for granted that all the faculty accepted the basic tenets of the tutorial method. Any teacher who did not accept the method either left the faculty or suppressed his objections and conducted the tutorial classroom reluctantly. Given the present shortage of teaching jobs, any composition program can surely find enough teachers who will accept compulsory use of any method, but I doubt whether such teaching really serves the best interests of the students. Those who want to establish a tutorial program might do better to begin with a nucleus of committed teachers and compete on the open market with other methods. Let the students themselves decide which method works best for them.

The second problem relates to communication. Whenever all or part of a program decides to develop a composition course with a distinct method or identity, the teachers involved will soon need some coordinating structure. In a large group this structure may take the form of a steering committee while smaller programs may work well as a committee of the whole. This coordinating structure will have at least four essential functions:

1. To establish and update guidelines that define the program. For example, they should decide what kinds of material justify whole-class presentation and what stages of the writing process should be reviewed in tutorial sessions. Such guidelines might endorse whole class sessions for

orientation, making assignments, and announcing changes in schedule. Tutorials might be recommended for discussing paper topics, dealing with individual writing problems, and approving completed stages of the paper. Such an agreement would permit flexibility for individual teachers yet forestall doubts about when and how they should conform to the group pattern in order to preserve the integrity of the method. Without some sort of definition, the program will inevitably disintegrate into a group of unrelated classrooms.

2. Provide a procedure for orienting teachers entering the program. In addition to discussing administrative procedures, this presentation should include the guidelines set up by the coordinating structure. If possible, new teachers should also discuss types of conference strategy and perhaps view a demonstration of contrasting types. Experienced faculty should alert novices to the problems they may face and suggest ways to cope with them. Every effort should be made to provide support and assistance to those joining the program.

3. Maintain communication within the program through some sort of newsletter and/or regular staff meetings so that busy teachers can keep in contact with each other, current literature in the field, and similar programs in other schools. Such communication will nourish espirit de corps and stimulate teachers to develop their techniques.

4. Oversee updating and evaluation of the program. Unless someone has fixed responsibility for this job it will remain either neglected or haphazard. In the press of day-to-day classroom business, teachers easily forget to ask themselves, Why am I doing what I'm doing? Is it really helping my students? Is there a better way to do it? Do these students need something different from the students I had last year? If they do ask these questions but have no way of getting answers, they often feel nagging doubts.

Some sort of performance-orientated evaluation such as I have already suggested should either reassure teachers or help them adjust their course periodically.

So far I have looked at problems within the composition program itself, but outside forces in the community or the society as a whole may soon threaten any non-traditional method. These forces now rally around the Back-to-Basics movement. Parallel to conservative political trends, this movement stresses a return to old and familiar methods and subject matter in the American classroom. Applied to the teaching of writing, Back-to-Basics could mean a return to drills on spelling and mechanics and exercises using isolated sentences and paragraphs. In its stress on skills for editing the final draft, such an emphasis would inevitably neglect the process by which the draft is produced and thus undermine the concepts supporting the tutorial classroom. If we judge that today's students generally cannot master the writing process on their own, we will conclude that emphasis on editing would hardly help those who cannot produce a viable first draft. However, if the present mood in the Back-to-Basics movement persists, such conclusions may fail to shield the workshop classroom from serious attack.

Though the general outlook appears by no means certain, advocates of the tutorial method have no excuse for gloom. The growth of community colleges and the changing admission standards of four-year institutions should give the workshop classroom increasing appeal to teachers eager to meet changing student needs. Properly coordinated tutorial programs can maintain their identity and adaptability. Moreover, if their supporters can collect convincing evidence that they do a better job in preparing students to perform in the ways that students and the community regard as important, Back-to-Basics will pose little threat to their survival. Though the future of

any method ultimately depends on the skill of the teachers who use it, I believe the tutorial method has the potential to attract the kind of teacher able to make it work.

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[129] Project Literacy, p. 291.

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